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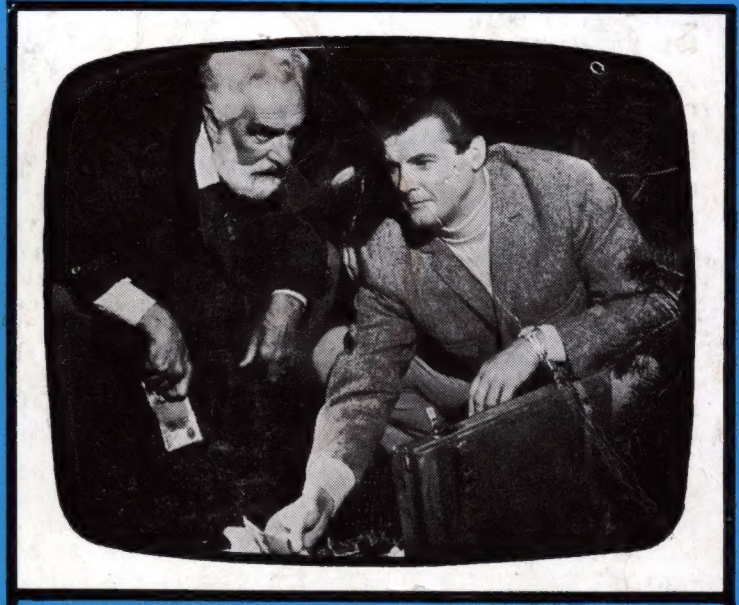

LESLIE CHARTERIS' THE saint
in A Brand New Book-Length Novel

THE DIZZY DAUGHTER

Adapted from The Original T. V. Script

ALSO

CORNELL WOOLRICH
AVRAM DAVIDSON
JAMES MICHAEL ULLMAN
PHILIP WYLIE
ARTHUR MOORE
AND OTHERS

The answer to that old argument-stopper "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" may be forever lost in the primordial mists of Evolution, but about saints there is no such obscurity: the Church of Rome invented them, and to this day claims the sole prerogative of canonizing any legitimate new ones.

The Saint with whom many readers of this Magazine are possibly most familiar, therefore, although they would not be likely to confuse him with any of the officially holy ones, was conceived by me in gross infringement of all religious monopoly, albeit without sacrilegious intent. It simply seemed like a good sobriquet to epitomise some of the paradoxes inherent in the character I had in mind.

However, in the 40 odd years since I impudently conferred that title on him, my Saint has managed to acquire enough prestige in his own right for his name to be taken in vain by a disparate assortment of individuals, many of whom were certainly not associating it with any saints recognized by the Vatican.

For instance, on a visit to Washington many years ago, I discovered that there were already seven persons of lamentable record in the files of the FBI who had chosen at one time or another to be nicknamed "The Saint". And these could be only a fraction of the minor miscreants whom I regularly read about in news items from many different countries, who have misguidedly thought it cute or appropriate to leave a Saint signature on the scenes of their felonies or misdemeanors. Sadly as such masqueraders may misinterpret the real principles of Simon Templar, there can be no doubt that he was the only Saint they were thinking of.

In January 1966, TIME Magazine carried an item about a grave embarrassment which had been caused to Italian Foreign Minister Amintore Fanfani, at that time President of the UN General Assembly, by a friend named *"Giorgio La Pira, known as 'the Saint' to his admirers, who credit even his garments with healing powers... Fanfani and his buxom dimpled wife...have not only been close friends to La Pira, but...even had one of the Saint's old hats around to wave over the heads of their seven children as a 'cure' for minor ailments."* The bricks which La Pira dropped don't matter in this context, but it was a funny sort of jolt to have my eye caught by a casual phrase like "one of the Saint's old hats" and to wonder even briefly how Simon had got into that bit.

There are, however, other associations which may still provoke speculation.

In England, for example, a professional football team based in Southampton has long been known to its fans as The Saints. And in America this year, a team freshly formed in New Orleans formally decided to call itself The Saints.

Neither of them ever thought of asking my blessing—but that's nothing new. Did they ask the Pope, either? I'm wondering which of us should feel slighted.

Leslie Charteris

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LESLIE CHARTERIS'

THE saint in

the dizzy daughter

Adapted by FLEMING LEE
From an original story by D. R. MOTTON
Teleplay by LEIGH VANCE

The photos in this story are taken from the NEW TV series produced by ITS and now broadcast in color every Sunday evening on the NBC-TV Network.

Roger Moore, as the Saint, talks to June Ritchie, who plays the feminine lead in LITTLE GIRL LOST. **(See page 25)**

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FOREWORD

Readers with sleuth-trained memories and reactions, who really worry about such details, may recall that this plot was put out on television in some areas under the title of LITTLE GIRL LOST. Our title has not been changed to deceive anyone, but because we just like it better. This is the venerable justification of every movie or television producer who ever bought a book and then changed all the ingredients around to suit his own preferences. I am now taking advantage of what may be a historically unique opportunity to reverse the process. You may have seen the picture, on your little automated magic-lantern: now read the story as I might have written it, if I had been on the job.

The readable adaptation, as in our last two experiments with this method, is by the same talented interpreter, Fleming Lee, with my own final revisions. Obviously, this story is not even now exactly the way I might have written it. But it is very interestingly close. *L.C.*

The golden sun grew fat in its old age, and as it sank low over the distant Irish hills the whole countryside seemed to share in the hush of its going. There was no breeze. The birds were still, and even the stream, moving deep and slow between green banks, made scarcely a murmur. Only now and then a trout, striking at some floating insect in the shallows, would break the silence with a sudden splash whose purl quickly smoothed and silently vanished.

Simon Templar stood tall and lean by the water, his blue eyes watching the surface for signs of trout within range of his line. An ambiguous swirl downstream failed to distract him. He had chosen this pool because instinct—sharpened by a lifetime of hunting human prey, and not rarely being hunted himself—told him that in thus widening of the stream would be lurking a prize worthy of his time and skill.

So he waited, poised and strong, his rod held ready.

That the man known somewhat incongruously as the Saint should be found in such peaceful surroundings was unusual. (His true character was better described by another of his informal appellations, voiced by police officers and criminals with equal unease, the Robin Hood of Modern Crime.) That such peace should last long, even in rural Kildare, half an hour's drive from Dublin, was inconceivable, for the Saint could no more escape adventure than a fish could escape its brook and stroll off across the fields, and in general he had no desire to do so.

But even a man whose natural medium is excitement occasionally wants a change of pace, and for the moment Simon Templar wanted and had found it—though his sixth sense, nagging like the faintly expanding sound of a speeding car in the distance, warned him to enjoy it thoroughly now before his fated propensity for trouble swung the balance back to normal.

The Saint had driven into Dublin on the previous afternoon with the plan of meeting an old friend, the soldier of fortune, Patrick Kelly, at the Gresham Hotel, spending the night there, while Kelly enjoyed a reunion with comrades-at-arms, and then going out to Kelly' house in the country seventy miles west for two or three days of fishing.

All had gone as planned up to and including Kelly's enjoyment of his reunion, in which he had insisted Simon take part. But Kelly's enjoyment had been so immense, and celebrated with such grand libations of porter and thrice-distilled Gaelic fire, that he had found himself disinclined to go on with the rest of the schedule when Simon wakened him by house phone at noon. He had found himself unready, in fact, to leave his hotel bed, and had announced in that brief interval between prolonged periods of unconsciousness that the drive to his cottage would have to be delayed at least until evening—and since they would be paying for another night in the hotel anyway, probably until the next morning.

The Saint, after a one p.m. brunch, had gone on out into the country for two reasons: he was in the mood for fishing, and he did not want to spend the afternoon near the hotel, where he would most inevitably get involved in somebody else's problems. Among Pat Kelly's more exuberant activities of the night before, once he got to the table-pounding stage, had been the repeated proud bellowing of Simon's name not only in the Cocktail Bar of the Gresham, but also in numerous other places along the streets of Dublin's fair city. Such widespread advertising of the Saint's presence was a virtual guarantee that he would not have been able to spend an afternoon in town undisturbed by some stranger.

Near the center of the stream the surface swirled, and a slowly waving tail broke the orange-gold reflections of over-hanging trees. The Saint made a perfect cast upstream of the fish. The brightly colored fly drifted slowly with the current toward the target of concentric ripples made by the trout's rising, and Simon carefully reeled in just enough of the floating line to insure control if the big fish struck.

The sound of the fast-moving automobile which a few moments before had been imperceptible was now much closer. Tires squealed less than two hundred yards away. The only road in the vicinity followed the stream where Simon was fishing, and he was standing within thirty feet of a sharp curve in the pavement. He was not worried about his own safety, however, but about his car, which was parked on the shoulder between road and stream and could easily be demolished if the speeder overshot the turn.

Irish country roads are not made for fast travel. Cars are few, carts and sheep are plentiful, and a normal brisk driving speed is thirty-five miles per hour. So it was particularly irritating to Simon that some maniac had chosen this stretch of asphalt on which to attempt suicide, and that the aberration had to occur just when a rising trout begged for all his concentration.

Once the racing car hit the curve, there was nothing Simon could do but jerk the fly from the very mouth of the expectant fish and prepare to dodge hurtling tons of metal. It was a green Volkswagen, and it skidded with an anguished howl of scorching rubber, rear end swinging as the driver narrowly missed Simon's car by slamming on brakes and heading for the old stone wall on the opposite side of the road. Then to avoid smashing into the wall the driver made an immediate sudden turn back toward the outside of the curve. The Volkswagen pirouetted completely around on all four wheels as if it had been on ice, miraculously failed to turn over, left the road, and skidded toward the stream, its locked rear wheels plowing up turf, and came to a halt between two trees without hitting either.

As Simon strode toward it, his rod still in hand, the engine was dead, and the driver, a girl, was slumped forward over the wheel. But, before he had covered half the distance between them, she looked up suddenly with terror in her eyes, and it was obvious that she had been shaken rather than knocked unconscious.

She was young—scarcely nineteen, Simon estimated on first sight—and the deep brown eyes that were fixed on him were extraordinarily large. Her chestnut hair was chopped short, her mouth was small and provocative, her nose pert and uptilted.

The Saint realized instantly that neither the acrobatics of her car nor his own appearance—which considering his frame of mind probably had a rather threatening aspect—was the cause of the stark fear on her pretty face After the initial moment of staring at him, she looked up the road in the direction from which she

had come, grabbed at the door handle, and scrambled out of her car.

It was then that Simon heard the second car rushing nearer, with the same screech of tires on curves which had preceded the arrival of the girl, and realized that it was the apparent cause of her panic.

"Le Mans is that way," he said helpfully, gesturing with his fishing rod. "You must have missed a turn somewhere."

"Please!" she cried. "Help me!"

She was hurrying toward him, the short tight skirt of her stylish suit restricting her legs, her stiletto heels stabbing into the damp earth of the stream's bank.

"Help you do what?" he asked. "Change tires for the next stretch? I'm sorry, but I don't have much sympathy for anybody who. . ."

"They'll get me," she gasped, stumbling up to him and clutching his arms. "Hide me. Do something."

She was a foot shorter than the Saint, and had to look almost straight up to meet his skeptical blue eyes at that close range.

"This reminds me of a movie I saw once," he said blandly. "Except there the girl kissed the stranger and said, "Please don't look up—hold me!" and then along came. . ."

The girl interrupted him with a despairing wail as a second automobile—this one a black Mercedes—came around the curve at a slightly saner rate than her Volkswagen had done, put on its brakes, and skidded to a stop on the road. Then it backed up with a roar and a spinning of wheels on to the shoulder between her car and Simon's.

"Do something!" she begged, putting the Saint between her and the emerging occupants of the Mercedes, and grasping his arms more tightly than ever.

"I'd have a better chance if my hands were free," he told her.

As she let him go and cowered by the water, the two men who had been in the black car sized up the situation and began moving slowly forward, separating to divide Simon's attention and cut down possible routes for his and the girl's escape. One of the quietly methodical and confident-seeming pursuers was rather overweight for his job, and his tautly stretched trench coat looked as if it had seen better days on a slenderer version of him. His bald dome gleamed red in the setting sun.

The second man was considerably smaller, and his trench coat was more rumpled than stretched. Graying sandy hair was closely

cropped on his narrow head, and veins showed large around his temples. His tongue, like a snake's, continuously darted out to touch his thin lips.

Since they did not speak, Simon saw no need to initiate a conversation. He waited, relaxed and alert, and almost imperceptibly stripped line from his reel. Finally, when the men were within ten feet of him, he flicked the fly into the air, dropped it over the far man's shoulder, and deftly sank the hook into his neck.

As the fat one yowled and groped with both hands behind him, his companion, thinking he was catching the Saint off guard, made an ill-considered move. He charged forward as Simon bent the fishing rod nearly double and let go the tip just in time to catch the attacker across the throat with the full force of the hissing whiplash of supple fiberglass.

The thin man went down on his knees, choking, and Simon simply shoved him with one strong hand into the deep stream. The obese member of the partnership, taking advantage of momentary slackness in the line, seemed about to free himself, but Simon reeled in, tugged, and brought the man wincing and stumbling forward. It was an easy matter to step out of his plump victim's path and add to the man's momentum with a swift boot to his ample rear. The splash of his belly-flop into the stream drenched the bank for yards around.

"Run!" the girl cried.

"It doesn't really seem necessary," said the Saint, placidly winding in his freed line as he watched the men struggle in the water as the current carried them slowly downstream. "Do you think they can swim?"

The girl glared at the sputtering pair with remarkable ferocity on her pixy face.

"I hope not!"

Simon gave her an inquiring look.

"They're *killers,*" she said.

"Not very good at it, are they?"

The girl was all but jumping up and down in her agitation.

"How can you stand there?" she whimpered. "They're getting out. They'll murder me. Please get me away from here."

The two men, safely out of range of Simon's fly rod, were clawing at the bank, trying to haul themselves out. The Saint was more than ready to take them on again, but he began to feel that the girl was actually going to collapse in hysterics if he did not humor her.

"All right," he said. "Let's go."

From the passenger seat of his car she pleaded with him to hurry as he snatched the key from the ignition of the Mercedes, and threw it out into the stream, bringing to an abrupt halt the efforts of the swimmers to get out of the water. They went splashing toward the spot where the key had gone down. Simon leisurely clamped his rod on the roof rack of his car. (He had carried no creel, since he had no way of using fish at the moment, and had released the ones he had caught.) Then he plucked a burr from his trouser leg, slipped into the driver's seat, and started the engine, much to the relief of his passenger.

"Where to?" he asked as he turned around his car and headed for Dublin. "Not that I'll take you there, but I'm curious to know where you'd choose if you had a choice."

The girl sank back in the seat, letting her head loll and her mouth open to take a deep breath.

"It doesn't matter," she sighed. "Anywhere. I'm just so glad to get away."

"How about Dublin?" he asked.

"That's fine." She looked dramatically with half-closed eyes at the twilit sky ahead. "Maybe there I can. . .lose myself in the crowds."

"Lose yourself in the crowds?" Simon repeated.

"Yes, it's my only chance. And then later, maybe, if they haven't caught up with me, I could. . ."

"Why don't you start from the beginning?" the Saint put in as her words faded in mid-sentence.

"I. . .I can't tell it," she said. "If you knew, your life would be in danger too."

"For all they know, I *do* know," said Simon. "So as long as my life is in danger anyway, I might as well have the satisfaction of being told why."

"Oh, that's true!" she exclaimed, clutching his arm. "I'm so sorry, Mr. . . . I don't even know your name."

"It's no secret," said Simon, and he told her.

She showed no recognition.

"I'm sorry I got you into this, Mr. Templar, and I don't know how to thank you enough. I don't even have any money now. I left my purse in the car."

Simon gave her a teasing look.

"Shall we go back and get it?"

"Oh, no!" she said. "There. . .wasn't much anyway."

"I think the best thing to do," the Saint said more seriously, "is to stop at the next village and put in calls to the police and a towing service... But we'll have to explain..."

She grabbed his arm again, shaking her head violently.

"We can't do that. For one thing...that car...wasn't mine."

"Whose is it?"

"I don't know. I borrowed it."

"Stole it?" Simon asked.

"Yes, in Carlow. It was the first one I found with a key in it—after I got away."

Simon stopped at the Kildare-Dublin highway, turned onto it, and picked up speed—just in case Thin and Fat had retrieved their keys.

"Got away from what?" he asked.

The girl sighed.

"It's such a long story, and you'll never believe it."

"Well, give me a try. For a start, what's your name?"

"My real one?" she asked.

"Preferably," said the Saint drily.

"You'd never believe that, either."

He shrugged.

"I do have a nasty perverse habit of never believing people's names, but don't let that stop you."

She hesitated.

"I'm called...Mildred. And..."

"And?" Simon said encouragingly.

"And my father was Adolf Hitler."

—2—

It was one of Simon Templar's characteristics that no blow to his mental equilibrium, however severe, was allowed to produce more than a ripple on his surface. So when his passenger announced that she was Hitler's daughter, and looked at him timorously to see what his reaction would be, she saw nothing but the usual imperturbable nonchalance.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Miss Hitler," he said, as it occurred to him that he had possibly, just a few minutes before, deposited two employees of a mental hospital in a tributary of the River Liffey.

But that was only a passing thought, since men in white jack-

ets, even when not wearing their white jackets, would not close menacingly in on an uninformed bystander without a word of explanation.

"I knew you wouldn't believe me," the girl said, and she began to cry.

"Who said I didn't believe you?" protested the Saint with elaborate innocence. "Why shouldn't I believe you?"

She sniffled, wiping her eyes with the backs of her hands. It was growing dark now, and the increasing traffic glared with headlights.

"You believe me?" she asked.

"I didn't say that, exactly. I said why shouldn't I believe you? What else can I do? I was going to suggest that when we got to my hotel we could telephone your parents, but I guess that's out of the question."

She looked at him indignantly.

"You're callous," she said. "Making fun of an orphan."

Simon, because he was driving, could not devote a really effective squelching look to her.

"Now listen to me, young lady," he said with impressive firmness. "I am not making fun of you. I have not even questioned your fantastic identity. I have lost a world-record trout because of you, scuffed my shoe kicking your enemies into the river, and am now in the process of further saving your neck. So if you start pulling female temperament on me, I'm going to lose patience and give you a spanking."

She stared at him, her big eyes getting rounder.

"Spanking?" she squeaked.

"Yes. You look very spankable, and just the right size to fit across my knee. And I can't say I wouldn't enjoy it. . .for more reasons than one."

With compressed lips, she smiled in spite of herself.

"I'm too old for a spanking," she said without defiance.

"Not you," said the Saint. "Let's see, your father died in 1945. That makes you about. . .twenty-two at the least."

"Twenty-three," she said.

"Before we go any more into your earlier history, tell me something: why are those men trying to kill you?"

She shook her head.

"Oh. They weren't. They were trying to capture me."

"You said they were killers."

"Well, that wasn't exactly the truth. I couldn't tell you the

whole story right then, and I had to make you take me away in a hurry, so that seemed the best thing to say."

Simon nodded.

"Who are they, then?" he asked.

"They're SS men. They slipped into Ireland on a submarine with me during the last weeks of the war. There were four originally, sworn just to protect me, but one died and another one killed himself when somebody discovered his real identity."

"And where have you been all this time—since the end of the war?"

"In a convent. And those men have lived nearby on a little farm."

"What did the nuns think about all this?" Simon asked, slowing as Emmet Road took them in toward the heart of Dublin.

"Only the Mother Superior knew who I really was. She was a close relative of one of the high party members—the Nazi Party, I mean. The other nuns were given the story that I was the illegitimate daughter of a bishop."

Simon covered his mouth with one hand and appeared to cough.

"The illegitimate daughter of a bishop?" he repeated, solemnly, more for confirmation of the sound than as a question.

"Yes. But I wasn't to be raised as a nun. That way I'd have been lost to the world forever. Instead I was given my own little apartment—if you can call it that—in a wing of the convent. What a lonely life that was! I had tutoring, and all the books I wanted. . ."

"And nice clothes," the Saint said, glancing at her fashionable suit.

"Oh. . .this? I bought this after they took me out. In fact that's how I gave them the slip. I was in the changing room of the shop to try it on, and I discovered a way out the back. So then I went along an alley to the main street and borrowed that Volkswagen. Unfortunately they realized I was taking too long and came after me, and I never managed to shake them completely."

She was sitting bolt upright in her seat, hands folded in her lap, completely absorbed in her own words, chattering at a rate that would have shamed an auctioneer.

"Lucky thing they taught automobile driving at the convent," Simon said.

She didn't bat even one eye.

"Oh, they didn't teach me there. The SS taught me on the

farm. In case something happened to them they figured I might need to know how."

"So you lived on the farm too?"

"Only for a few days, right after they took me out of the convent."

Simon turned and crossed River Liffey between the ornate iron lampposts that lined either side of O'Connell Bridge.

"So here you are," he said. "All grown up, a skillful and sensible driver, with lots of books under your belt and lovely clothes on your lovely back. There's just one thing: Why were your guardians chasing you?"

"Because I didn't want to cooperate."

"Cooperate in what?" Simon asked.

"Their plan is to take me back to Germany as the figurehead for a new Nazi movement."

They had reached upper O'Connell Street and the Gresham Hotel, so Mildred's narrative had to be interrupted at that climactic point, with no really worthy response by the Saint. Surrendering the car to the doorman he held her through the lobby, where the egress of well-clad guests for dinner, theater, or cinema was just beginning.

"Would you like to use my room for freshening up?" Simon asked.

"I'd much rather have a drink."

"Drinking too?" he remarked as they entered the mezzanine Cocktail Bar. "What goes on in these convents?"

She looked at him with doe-eyed ingenuousness.

"I have to learn, don't I?"

"If it's learning to drink you want," Simon said in a louder voice with traces of an Irish brogue, "here's just the teacher for you."

Patrick Kelly, who was seated at the bar attending to a bottle of Jameson, turned his great red head and split its lower half with a prognathous grin.

"Simon, ye ould dog!" he bellowed. "Ye tould me ye were goin' fishin', but niver that this was what it was ye were fishin' for!"

"Pat, meet Mildred," said the Saint, "and call for two more glasses."

Kelly gave her a more than appreciative look and his ham-sized mitt enveloped her fingers.

"I'm charmed. A face like a darlin' jewel itself she has—and

here I've slept the entire mornin' away."

"It's evening," Mildred said innocently, taking a stool between the men.

"Oh, and shure you're mistaken," said Kelly, rearing back to inspect the watch on his hairy wrist. "Seven in the mornin' it must be. Here—have a bite o' breakfast."

He poured whiskey into the clean glasses brought by the bartender. Mildred shivered and looked over her shoulder.

"What if they followed us?" she whispered.

"I wouldn't worry," Simon said. "And what could they do in a public place?"

"What could who do?" Kelly asked. "Who's followin' ye?"

Simon finished his drink and stood up.

"It's a long and wonderful story, and I'll leave Mildred to tell it to you while I change for dinner. I've been fishing and fighting all afternoon."

Kelly swelled like an excited bullfrog.

"Ye mean to say I missed a fight too?"

"Big one," the Saint said casually. "SS men."

Kelly snorted.

"Ye don't mean them big German fellas with the black uniforms? Now ye're handin' me a pail of malarkey, man. There's been none of them about for twenty years."

"Ask Mildred," Simon said.

As he strolled away from the bar, he heard her begin in a low confidential voice:

"How much do you remember about Hitler's death?"

When Simon returned from his room, showered and immaculately dressed, he found Kelly looking dazed and Mildred chattering like a magpie just recovered from laryngitis.

"Simon!" the Irishman exclaimed. "Ye should only hear what she's been tellin' me!"

His sidewise look at the Saint held more doubt than his voice. He obviously wanted some confirmation or denial, but he got only a helpless gesture of upturned hands.

"Let's go eat," Simon said. "Mildred's problem isn't the kind of thing I like to think about with an empty stomach."

She clutched his arm in what was becoming an habitual gesture.

"I'm frightened to go out," she said. "What if they. . ."

"No need to be frightened while *I'm* about," Kelly assured her, displaying a fist big enough to crack the Blarney stone. "Simon

an' me have handled worse than a couple o' second-hand supermen."

"And we don't even need to leave the hotel," Simon said. "The Grill here is as good as anyplace in town."

As they were leaving the bar, Kelly stopped, tucked in his chin and stared down at Mildred.

"But only imagine," he said, "a tiny thing like this going to conquer the world!"

—3—

Simon placed his fork on the platter which minutes before had been heaped with the delectable cadavers of Dublin Bay prawns, looked contentedly around at the elegant red and black decor of the Gresham Grill, and finally let his gaze come to rest on Mildred, who avoided a direct meeting with its intensity by chasing a last bit of lettuce across the salad plate. Kelly was still engaged in demolishing a double-cut steak done to dry death in the manner admired by true Gaelic countrymen.

"Mildred," said the Saint thoughtfully, "what are we going to do about you?"

She shrugged uncomfortably.

"I don't know. But I think I must get out of Dublin—and out of the country. I'll hide someplace where they'll never find me." Her eyes grew brighter as inspiration began to flow again. "I once read a story about a girl who disguised herself as a boy and signed on a ship and nobody found out for months. I'll take a schooner to the South Seas, and then I'll. . ."

Kelly looked at her figure appreciatively as he mopped his mouth with a napkin.

"I'm afraid ye'd never get away with that disguise for more than an hour."

"No," said Simon. "I'm sure there must be a better way. Are you sure you've told us all the facts, exactly as they are?"

She looked him in the eye.

"As incredible as it sounds, it's all the gospel truth."

"And I don't suppose you know anybody who can help you?" the Saint said.

"Not a soul. Only you—and I've given you too much trouble already—and put you in danger."

She closed her eyes and tears appeared on her long brown

lashes. The Saint and Kelly exchanged unbelieving but concerned glances.

"Simon," said the Irishman, "shure and to let her go now would be like castin' out a kitten in a snowstorm." He pushed back his chair and gave the table a decisive thump with a meaty paw. "If talk were cloth a man might have the makin's of an overcoat— An ould soldier like me can't stand such a quantity of speech without no action. Here's what we'll do. We'll take her out to my place. It's so far from anything, God Himself couldn't find it with a guidebook. There she'll be safe, and Simon and me won't mind havin' a nice little girl about the house to make things cozy when we come in from fishin' all day." He looked at Mildred. "Me dear wife's down in Cork visitin' her mother, and I'm like a lost soul, with dirty dishes pilin' clear up to the rafters."

The Saint watched Mildred's reactions to that speech and saw that she was delighted with the idea—though her eager expression wilted a little at the mention of dirty dishes.

"Well, Pat," he said, "I couldn't have thought of a better plan myself. If this poor misguided child honestly prefers us to the SS, she's welcome to come along. Maybe a little fresh country air will clear our heads and give us some good ideas for the next step."

Mildred was ecstatic.

"You really don't mind?" she said excitedly. "You'll let me come?"

Simon nodded.

"And I think the sooner we get on our way the better. It's just possible those guardians of yours recognized my face and could trace us here."

She gave him a puzzled look.

"Why should they recognize your face?"

Her ignorance offended Kelly's pride of friendship.

"Good heavens, girl! Haven't ye heard of the Saint? Simon Templar—the Saint?"

He seemed to think that if he spoke the name to her loud enough she would be bound to recognize it. But she looked at him blankly.

"Saint?" she said.

"Never mind," said Simon. "Remember, she's been cooped up in a convent for over twenty years."

There was a ray of dawn on Mildred's face.

"You mean you're famous," she said. "And I didn't even know it. I'm so sorry."

"Didn't they give ye any newspapers or anything in that place?" Kelly inquired, as Simon asked their waiter for the check.

"They were very careful about what I saw," Mildred explained. "No newspapers or magazines. I was brought up to think of my father as a great hero who tried to save the West from Bolshevism, and I was told that even though he had lost the war there were still millions and millions of people who believed in his cause and were only waiting for something to give them the courage to stand up and be counted. Then one day I came across something in one of the convent's books that showed me some of the other side of the story. I guess with all the books they let me read they were bound not to screen them all quite carefully enough. So when I realized what the rest of the world seemed to think of my father I was shocked."

"Made ye see the light, did it?" Kelly said.

"Well, naturally I didn't just turn right around and deny everything I'd been taught since I was born—but I had enough doubts to want to find out both sides of the story before I let anybody use me to lead a big political movement. That's why I ran away."

Simon stood up, putting money on the table.

"A wise decision," he said. "Now I think you'd be safer coming up to my room while Pat and I pack than staying down here by yourself."

"If ye don't mind," said Kelly, "I'll have a final spot o' gargle for me nerves, and then I'll be off to get me things."

Mildred went with Simon out to the lobby as Kelly waved down the waiter. Most hotel guests who were going out were out by now, and the receptionist, a blonde woman, was intent on her record books. A dowdy man in a rumpled suit was reading a newspaper nearby. Then a porter came through the main entrance from the street carrying a pair of expensive-looking leather bags. Behind him walked a tall thin gentleman of about fifty-five, with a strangely egg-shaped head, long grey hair falling thick on the back of his neck, and bulging brown eyes. He was obviously in a hurry, and with those enormous compelling eyes fixed on the receptionist toward whom he was heading he did not notice the Saint and Mildred, who by then had just reached the elevator at one side of the lobby.

Simon would have thought nothing about the newcomer if it had not been for Mildred's reaction. In a fraction of a second

all the color drained from her face and she gasped audibly.

"I'll be back in a minute," she whispered, averting her head. "Ladies' room."

And she disappeared into a public corridor next to the elevator.

Naturally the Saint's former lack of interest in the stranger immediately increased by one hundred percent, and he sauntered back into the vicinity of the reception desk and pretended to study the contents of a magazine rack. The rumpled man with the newspaper was likewise affected by the guest's arrival. He got to his feet, put down his paper, and hovered expectantly like a suppliant waiting his moment to petition the passing emperor.

"Good evening, sir," said the blonde receptionist pleasantly. "Do you have a reservation?"

The protuberant eyes fixed her scornfully.

"I take it you do not recognize me?"

The woman, since she clearly did not recognize him, was a little flustered.

"No, sir. I'm afraid not. I. . ."

"It doesn't matter," he grumbled. "My name is Drew, and I have a reservation."

She found his card quickly.

"Mr. Eugene Drew?" she said.

"That's correct."

She pushed the register toward him and he scrawled a signature.

"I've read about you, Mr. Drew," she said. "In the papers. Consolidated Steel, and the coal mines, and. . ."

Her belated recognition of his importance failed to mollify him.

"It doesn't matter," he said abruptly. "Have you held the suite I requested?"

"Of course, sir. The porter will take you up."

As Drew walked from the desk the man who had been waiting came up to him.

"Mr. Drew, sir," he said in a low voice, with an ingratiating smirk, "Me name is Blaney, Correspondent for the *London Echo*."

"Wonderful," Drew remarked, with superciliousness that would have shriveled an apple on the spot. "Now if you'll pardon me. . ."

"Just a word," wheedled Blaney, "on the reasons for yer visit."

"No comment."

"Is there any truth in this talk ye're interested in buyin' into the Hardacre Group?"

"Get out of my way."

Drew stepped around the reporter, who moved along with him crab-style.

"There's rumors, sir," the reporter said in a more intense but less audible tone, "that serious troubles in yer family have..."

Drew stopped and turned to face the speaker.

"I shall not forget your name, Blaney, and if you address one more question to me I shall contact Lord Abbeyvale, the proprietor of your paper, and request that he dismiss you immediately. I assure you he will respect my wishes."

The reporter, beaten, backed away with cringing nods.

"Thank yer, sir. Thank yer very kindly in any case."

As Blaney made his exit, Simon returned to the corridor down which Mildred had disappeared. Before he had gone more than a few steps, however, he heard Drew's name called breathlessly in the lobby he had just left. A glance over his shoulder told him that his alleged SS acquaintances from the trout stream had just come into the hotel—in dry clothes and unmuddied shoes—and were hurrying toward the elevator. They passed from his field of view, but he could hear the first exchange of words.

"Why are you alone?" Drew demanded.

"We thought we had her," said one of the men, "but some bloke interfered. We have a strong clue, though, and we'll soon pick up her trail, I'm sure."

"Let's not broadcast it to the whole world, shall we?" Drew said in a sharp, hushed voice. "Come to my room."

There was a swoosh as the elevator doors closed behind them, and Simon was left with time for a few moments of silent meditation before Mildred rejoined him.

First, the SS man's speech had betrayed more influences of Liverpool than of Berchtesgaden. He had no German accent at all. That came as no surprise to the Saint, who by now had about as much confidence in Mildred's veracity as he did in the Flat Earth theory. The next obvious question was, then, what exactly was her relation to Eugene Drew?

Simon's speculations on that were delayed by the cautious arrival of Mildred herself.

"He's gone," Simon said.

"Who?" she asked, wide-eyed.

"The man you were running away from."

"I wasn't running away. I told you where I was going."

The Saint pushed the elevator button.

"Your friends are here," he said casually.

"What friends?"

"Your SS friends."

She looked completely shattered, and all but pulled at the parting elevator doors to get inside, glancing fearfully over her shoulder.

"Where? Did they see you?"

"No," Simon said. "Nothing to worry about."

He told the elevator operator his floor and discouraged Mildred from any more talking with a warning shake of his head. As soon as they were in his room she wanted to know everything.

"They came in and went straight for that fellow I thought you were avoiding," said Simon, opening a suitcase on the bed and beginning to pack immediately, as Mildred paced up and down the Donegal carpeting.

"How could they have followed us here?" she asked, biting the edge of one of her pink-painted fingernails.

"I don't think they did. They seemed to have an appointment with the gentleman you weren't running away from—Eugene Drew."

She showed no reaction at the name.

"You wouldn't have heard of him, of course," Simon continued, "considering the sheltered life you've led. But he's one of the biggest industrialists in Northern Ireland."

Mildred stopped pacing, and sucked in her lower lip.

"Maybe he's one of them," she theorized suddenly. "I heard them mention a man called Kleinschmidt, who changed his name and was some kind of Nazi agent here even before the war. He's probably scheduled to take over all of Ireland when they make their move."

The Saint looked at her with a kind of ambiguous admiration.

"Fantastic," he said. "In a single day you've changed my whole picture of the history of our times."

The phone rang, and Simon answered. It was Pat Kelly.

"I'm back in me own little room," he said, "and sober as a judge, in case ye're wonderin'. Shall we meet in the lobby in twenty minutes?"

"Fine," said Simon. "I'm just about ready now."

He was travelling light, and he had not even removed most of his clothes—the ones for fishing and country wear—from the suitcase during his short stay at the hotel. So he had only to pack his toilet kit, and then he was ready to call for the porter.

"I think we'll send you down the stairwell," he said to Mildred.

"Your guardians wouldn't be likely to use it, and I'll meet you. . ."

There was a knock at the door. Mildred froze and her eyes grew wide.

"It's them," she whispered.

"Clairvoyant too?" asked the Saint.

Mildred looked like a frightened rabbit.

"Who else could it be?"

"Maybe I've just won the sweepstakes," the Saint suggested. "But in case you're right, get in the wardrobe."

She obeyed, and Simon hurried into the bathroom as the knocking continued. He took the bath brush from its rack and laid it on the edge of the washbasin so that the brush was under the faucet. He put an empty plastic soapdish on the brush and turned on the tap just enough to produce a fast drip. Within a short time the soap dish would fill enough with water to unbalance the brush and make it fall into the basin. The whole operation took only a few moments.

Simon closed the bathroom door, making sure the key was in the outside. Then he pushed the door of the wardrobe firmly shut and went to answer the knocking. While he was prepared for anything, the Saint was nevertheless a little surprised to see Mildred's SS guardians standing there. He had considered the bath brush ticket a probable waste of energy.

But he did not show his surprise any more than he betrayed any concern over the pistol in the fat man's hand. His face was as serene as his afternoon had been before they and Mildred had interrupted it.

"Looking for the clown auditions?" he asked obligingly. "The circus manager's room is next door."

"Never mind," said the one with the gun, displaying a notable lack of a sense of humor. "Stand back."

Simon obeyed, being sure that his calm retreat took him toward the closed bathroom door.

"Did you enjoy your swim?" he inquired.

"Where is she?" demanded the thin one.

"Who?" asked Simon

"The girl."

"Gone about her father's business, I suppose."

"Mister," said the fat one, "you're getting in our way. I dislike violence, but if I have to I'll rub you out like a chalk mark."

At that point the brush clattered into the washbasin, and Simon made an exaggerated move to put himself between the men and

the bathroom door. The one with the gun stepped forward, then gestured for the thin one to investigate. There was a brief moment when the thin one was just inside the bathroom, and the fat one was off his guard, turning to peer over his companion's shoulder. That was the moment the Saint chose to use his foot, for the second time that day, on the posterior of the plumper of the pair, who was propelled forward through the doorway, striking his partner with something like the effect of a billiard on a ping pong ball. The thin man caromed into the shower stall, while the fat one carried enough momentum to send him stumbling to another corner of the little room. Simon quickly closed and locked the door, and almost before the captives had had time to start shouting and thumping he had opened the wardrobe and let Mildred out.

"Our friends have a great affinity for water," he said, picking up the telephone and dialing Kelly's room.

"Oh, you're wonderful!" said Mildred. She stationed herself at the door for a quick getaway. "How did you do it?"

"Pat," Simon said, when his friend answered. "I'm afraid the turnover in this hotel is a little fast for us. We'll have to hurry along and meet you at your house."

Before the startled Irishman could reply, Simon hung up, lifted one of his suitcases in either hand, and followed Mildred out into the corridor toward the elevator.

"What if. . .Kleinschmidt is down in the lobby?" she asked.

"Kleinschmidt?" said Simon. "Oh—the one who's taking over Ireland after the uprising. Well, I think I could handle him. If you prefer using the fire escape, go right ahead."

She chose to come with him in the elevator.

"Here, now, sir," the aged operator said, hurrying to take the suitcases. "Couldn't ye get a boy for helpin' with those?"

"We were in a hurry," the Saint answered. "Some people were anxious to see us, but we weren't so anxious to see them."

"Ah, and that's understandable enough," said the operator with a wink, casting an appreciative eye over Mildred's shape and virgin ring finger. "We'll have someone get those bags out front for ye now in a jiffy."

Simon tipped him and walked with Mildred to the desk, where he paid his bill and asked for his car to be brought around to the main entrance.

"I heard a lot of banging on my floor," he said to the clerk. "Like somebody trying to break a door down."

"I'll see to that, sir," the clerk said, and rang for a porter.

"Oh, Mr. Templar," Mildred said admiringly as they went out to the street, "how did you ever lock up both those men?"

"It's no more miraculous than the fact that they knew where we were." He looked at her closely. "Is it?"

"I. . .guess not. They're. . .diabolical. They've got agents everywhere. And maybe they did recognize your face this afternoon, and found out where you were staying."

The doorman stood by Simon's car at the curb.

"It's possible," Simon said as he helped Mildred in. "But I'm sure there's a simpler explanation. When we've had a chance to catch our breath, I want you to tell me the truth about it. If that won't be too frightful an effort."

—4—

As the Saint drove west through Dublin along the Liffey, he had the unmistakable feeling that his request for truth had put a damper on Mildred's ordinary talkativeness. She did not say anything, indeed, for more than twenty minutes. That fact was not totally without its charm, so Simon did not try to change the situation until they were driving through the dark countryside toward Leixlip and Kilcock.

"Now," he said, "how about telling me your real story."

Mildred performed a flouncing jerk and twisted around so that she was facing her own side of the car. A moment later Simon heard whimpering sounds.

"I realize the thought of being honest must be terribly painful for you," said the Saint, "but try to bear up."

There were snuffling noises, and then Mildred suddenly turned and looked through the back window.

"I think they're following us," she said in an urgent voice.

"You're changing the subject."

"No," she insisted, wiping her eyes excitedly as she went on looking. "I didn't mention it before, but I thought they picked us up just after we left the hotel. They must have got out of your room faster than we thought."

"The Keystone Stormtroops?" said Simon. "It doesn't seem very likely."

"They're probably just staying back there waiting till we stop someplace where they can get me."

In the rear view mirror Simon could see two pairs of headlights

several hundred feet behind. He slowed his own car as a test of the others' reactions, and they began closing the distance at a normal rate.

"If they were following us," he said, "they probably wouldn't catch up like that."

He increased the pressure of his foot on the accelerator.

"I can't help it," said Mildred, "I still think I saw them."

"And I still think you're looking for ways to avoid talking about yourself, Miss Hitler." He glanced at her. "Or is it Anastasia? Bridey Murphy?"

Mildred gave a sigh, let her shoulders slump for a moment, and then sat up straighter and looked at him.

"I think you know who I am," she said.

"I'm touched by your confidence."

Mildred's voice had lost some of its little-girl quality.

"You saw me react when my father walked into the lobby at the hotel.

"SS *Führer* Kleinschmidt is your father?"

"Eugene Drew is my father," she replied patiently. "And I think you've known all along."

The Saint nodded.

"You seemed a little young to be Hitler's daughter—though there was a family resemblance."

"Thanks."

They were driving through Leixlip, and Mildred pointed to a pub on a corner just ahead.

"Oh, let's stop in there a minute! I feel like a beastly mess after all that sniveling—and I could use a shot of something."

Simon slowed the car.

"I thought you were so worried about those goons you claim are following us."

She looked back.

"Maybe I was wrong—and we've got to stop sometime. Anyway, what can they do in the middle of town? Drag me kicking and screaming out of the local?" She gave him a stern look, like a child threatening its parent. "And if you won't stop here I'll never tell you *why* they're after me—and all the other juicy tidbits."

Simon turned off the main street and pulled up across from the pub.

"All right, Mildred, or whatever your name is at the moment. . ."

"It *is* Mildred," she interrupted.

Simon came around and opened her door.

"I guess we should celebrate your dropping old Adolf from your family tree," he said.

"Righto! And where are we going from here?"

"To Kelly's place, of course, unless you've changed your mind."

They crossed the quiet street, and Simon failed to see any sign of a lurking Mercedes in any direction.

"I mean where is Kelly's place?" Mildred asked.

"Somewhere east of Athlone, in the middle of nowhere. Why?"

"Well, naturally I'm curious."

Simon was sure that his own curiosity at least equaled hers, and by now it involved much more than the simple questions of why she was so anxious to avoid her father, and why a certain pair of rather bumbling bloodhounds were so anxious to have her not avoid them. Two or three obvious explanations were at the top of his consciousness, but something told him that where Mildred was involved, the obvious could never be automatically taken on trust.

He was content with the way things were going, though, and saw no reason to push the natural unfolding of events. The peace of his holiday was probably irretrievably lost, but peace had been replaced by the fascination of a Chinese magician's puzzle, in which illusion and reality were intriguingly mixed. Simon hoped, as a matter of fact, that the sleight-of-hand would not be entirely unmasked too soon. To be involved as he was gave the thrill of baiting a trout with a little brightly colored imitation of life in the rippled surface of a stream.

It required patience, but a man of Simon Templar's relaxed confidence could always command a supply of that virtue.

The pub was dim, smoky, and redolent of stout and the honest sweat of hiking from home to the tap. A dozen and a half of what appeared to be neighborhood regulars were enjoying the hospitality.

"Find us a table, will you, dear?" asked Mildred. "I've got to go and repair the damage." She indicated her face. "And make mine a Guinness."

Simon found a table in a corner, and the volume of talk, which had briefly diminished because of the arrival of a pair of strangers, soon returned to its original level. The barman took the Saint's order, brought it, in his own leisurely time, and several minutes later Mildred had still not returned. Finally the Saint, aware of the insatiable addiction of some women for ritualistic applications

of face paint, and secure in the knowledge that his car key was in his pocket, sat back with a sigh and began to drink alone.

When his share of the foamy dark liquid was half consumed, Mildred came back, looking cheerful and uncontrite.

"Now," she said brightly, "what would you like to know?"

She slipped into the chair beside him, propped her elbows on the table, and drank deeply from her glass, rolling her eyes to look at him as he answered.

"Let me see how much more you need to tell me. You're Eugene Drew's daughter. You obviously don't want to see Eugene Drew, but it seems that your father would like to see you. It seems, in fact, that he would like so much to see you that he has hired a couple of private investigators to find and catch you. Right so far?"

She nodded vigorously, her lips on the rim of her glass.

"Now, unless insanity runs in your family—which is a possibility I haven't by any means completely discounted—the most likely explanation is that you have run away from home and your poor distraught father is exerting every effort to bring you back into the fold. Just why you left home is another question. Maybe you did something naughty, like smother your little brothers and sisters, or hock your mama's diamond tiara, and you figure that any slaughtering that's done when you get back home will involve you instead of a fatted calf."

She giggled.

"You've got it right up to the end. But my feelings are hurt."

"Why?"

"Because you don't know why I ran away."

Simon finished his stout.

"Should I?"

"Don't you read the newspapers?"

"When I can't find any really *good* fiction I sometimes sink to that."

"Then why didn't you read about me?"

"I don't believe this escapade has been covered. I saw a reporter trying to worm something out of your father this evening. With no success, I might add."

"That sounds like Dad. He's rotten about the papers. That's one reason why he was so absolutely furious when I ran away with Rick."

"So there's another character in the cast," said the Saint. "Why

haven't I had the pleasure of meeting this Rick, if you're running away with him."

"That was last month. Rick is in America right now. It's Rick Fenton I'm talking about."

Simon shook his head.

"Doesn't ring a bell."

"Oh!" huffed Mildred, looking mortified. "Rick Fenton, I mean. The *actor*."

"Sorry," Simon said. "Has he played Hamlet?"

"He's a teeniebopper idol."

"Sounds positively sacrilegious," the Saint remarked. "What is it?"

"You know. . .all the teenage girls scream and faint when they see him. He's twenty-two but he looks seventeen, and he's a really fantastic actor."

"I'll bet he is," said Simon.

"He was in *Beach Towel Tramp* and *Teen Age Martian in a Girls' Dormitory*."

"I missed both of those. You can tell what an alienated life I lead."

"Anyway," Mildred said with resignation, "I ran away with him . . .to get married. But they caught me, and it was in all the papers, with pictures and everything. There was one of Dad with his hat in front of his face. He almost *died*."

Simon glanced at Mildred's glass, which was still two-thirds full.

"Why don't you drink up?" he suggested. "We can talk in the car. It's still an hour and a half to Kelly's place."

She obediently sipped a little of the stout.

"You don't want me to get drunk, do you?" she asked. "I'm very susceptible."

Simon sat back in his chair.

"You have thirty seconds," he said. "You used up most of your overtime in the powder room."

Mildred tilted up her glass, gulped down several large swallows of Guinness, and went on talking, half out of breath.

"So this time I've run away to marry Rick," she said. "We're terribly in love, and my father is hopelessly stubborn and mean. He wouldn't want me to marry the. . .the King of Arabia."

The Saint nodded.

"Probably not."

"And so," Mildred went on, "Rick is stopping over at Shannon Airfield on his way from America to Paris on a personal appear-

ance tour, and I'm going to join him." She drained her glass. "And rats to Big Daddy."

"When are you meeting Rick?" Simon asked.

Mildred opened her mouth to speak, then closed it and shook her head. She gave him a sly smile and wagged her finger.

"Oh, you won't get me to tell you that," she said. "What if I can't really trust you? That's all my father would need to know —when Rick was coming. Rick is smart. His publicity agent gave a false story to the papers, so as far as anybody knows, Rick isn't coming anywhere near Ireland."

"Brilliant," said Simon. "Absolutely brilliant. And if you don't trust me, how do you know I won't turn you over to your father in return for a nice fat reward."

She stared at him shocked, and clutched his arm as he stood up.

"Mr. Templar, you wouldn't! I thought I had to tell you, and I'd never believe you were the kind of person who. . ."

"Who'd stand in the way of true love? No, I suppose I'm not —not for the few paltry pounds I could squeeze out of a Scrooge like your father."

"You're wonderful!"

She flung her arms around him, to the amusement of the other patrons of the public house, who unanimously became silent and grinned. It was proabably the first time in the history of the establishment that there had been a total absence of talk during business hours for a period of four and a half seconds.

Simon left an overpayment on the table and steered Mildred out to the street, which was as empty as it had been when they first arrived. A few minutes later they were heading west out of town through the rolling moonlit countryside. Then Simon slowed the car a little.

Mildred shot him a worried look.

"You're not. . .taking me back, are you?"

He shook his head, looking into the rear view mirror.

"What is it?" she asked.

She turned to peer through the car's back window as Simon put down the accelerator again.

"I think," he said, "to use the immemorial words of immemorial suckers, that this time we *are* being followed."

—5—

Mildred began to show preliminary signs of hysteria.

"Oh, no! It's them! I know it is! I told you they were on to us before!"

"Maybe," said Simon cooly. "In any case, if you don't want to be embraced rather forcibly into the bosom of your family, you'd better get a map and flashlight out of the glove compartment. How's your navigation—or do you operate on intuition like your Papa Adolf?"

She snorted as she scrambled for the map and flashlight.

"I was a Queen's Guide at school. I could navigate my way to the Christmas Islands just by watching which side of the fishes the moss grows on."

She unfolded the detailed map of Ireland and turned the beam of light on it. The Saint had sped up along a straight stretch of road, and the other car was keeping pace about two hundred yards behind.

"You know where we are," he said. "See if you can find a place where we can turn off and lose them—and end up somewhere except in a peat bog."

Mildred bent close to the map and studied it. The short-lived directness of the highway degenerated into a series of snaky curves through a wooded section marked by rocky hillocks.

"There!" cried Mildred suddenly. "Up by that stone marker."

The Saint jammed down the brake pedal and swerved into the side lane. It was no more than a pair of wagon ruts made semi-respectable by an old topping of gravel. The way abounded with holes and humps, and Simon—driving without lights—was forced to slow to fifteen miles an hour in order to hold the car on its higher leaps to anything below treetop level.

Luckily, the other automobile had been too far behind around a curve to see what its prey had done. It swept by on the main road, its headlamps sending flickers of light through the woods.

"We lost them," Mildred said jubilantly.

The Saint was less enthusiastic.

"For the moment. If they've got any brains at all they'll see in a minute they've lost us and then they'll come back. Are there any other side roads near here that might confuse them?"

"Only one I can make out, and it looks like a dead end."

Simon stopped and turned off the engine. Then he listened closely to the receding sound of the car that had been pursuing them. Before it passed completely out of earshot, the noise of wailing tires on distant curves came to an abrupt halt. The Saint's sensi-

tive ears just barely made out the gunning of the engine and a couple of brief screeching spins of tires on asphalt.

"I think they've caught on," he said. "They're turning around."

He started his own car and continued down the horrendous trail, which was surely experiencing the passage of the first self-propelled vehicle in lifetime that must have dated back at least to Finn MacCool.

"Oh," said Mildred in a low voice.

She was looking at the map, her face bouncing in the pool of light just above it.

"What?" said Simon.

"You know that dead end road I mentioned?"

"Yes."

"We're on it."

The Saint's commentary was internal and sustained.

"I see," he said finally, with devastating quietness. "Mildred Hitler, girl guide, has done it again."

At that point, the tortured car gave a sudden lurch and stopped, slumped at an angle toward Mildred's side. Mildred's head bumped the glass in front of her with a lack of force which the Saint found faintly disappointing.

He turned off the ignition.

"Well," he remarked, "That's the second immobilized auto you can chalk up to your record today."

Mildred rubbed her head gingerly and looked even more gingerly at Simon.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Without checking on details, I should say that we have fallen into a hole." He took a deep breath and opened the door. "So . . .let's start walking. Under different circumstances I might stand and fight, but at the moment I really can't think of anything worth fighting for."

He walked around the front of the car and looked briefly at the damage. The wheel had slipped into a deeply eroded channel.

Mildred picked her way over the stones to join Simon.

"Can't you reverse out?" she asked.

"No. And I think the axle's bent anyway." He looked at her. "If your Papa Adolf's superman theories amounted to anything, you'd be able to lift up the whole mess and set it straight again."

Mildred did not answer, and Simon set off down the road in front of the car with swinging strides. Mildred hobbled and stumbled behind him in her high heels.

"Wait!" she cried finally. "I can't keep up."

"Stay behind then. I'm afraid you've used up your allotment of my chivalry. If the wolves catch you, they won't bother chasing me."

She let out a despairing wail and hurried after him up a moon-silvered hill, where the wagon track was thickly hedged with trees.

"Or maybe," Simon mused happily as he trudged along, hands in his pockets, "the little people will get you."

"Little people?" Mildred whimpered, catching up a bit.

"Sure. Leprechauns. This is just the spot for them. You look a bit pixyish. They might take you for one of their own."

"Damn!"

Mildred's exclamation had not been evoked by fear of Irish fairies. She balanced on one foot and held out her shoe for Simon to see. The stiletto heel had broken off.

"I can't walk like this," she moaned.

"Let's see the other shoe," said Simon.

She stood in her stocking feet and handed it to him. He grasped the remaining whole shoe firmly in both hands and snapped its heel off.

"There," he said proudly, handing it to her. "Now you're back on an even keel."

She threw both shoes on the ground and vigorously recited a phrase which she most definitely had not learned either in a convent or as a Queen's Guide.

"I'd advise you to wear those," the Saint said, starting up the hill again. "They're better than nothing—and your faithful followers may discover this road at any minute."

She clumped along beside him in the modified shoes, panting and clinging to his sleeve for occasional support. Simon looked up at the stars.

"Now is the time for fortitude and inner strength," he philosophized. "Keep the image of Rick firm in your mind. The course of true love never did run smooth."

They went on for ten minutes, and then they saw the reddish glow of a fire through the trees at the base of the hill. Simon led the way and looked cautiously into the small clearing. Around a bonfire stood or sat five people, as yet oblivious to Simon's and Mildred's arrival. There were a man and woman of late middle years, and a pair of girls and a boy ranging from about twelve to eighteen. All of them were devoting their attention to a soot-blackened metal pot which steamed over the fire, sus-

pended from a tripod. Nearby, a pair of horses grazed at the edge of a tiny brook. Like parts of a stage backdrop on the border of the circle of firelight stood two barrel-headed caravans —large painted wooden wagons like horizontal kegs on wheels —in which the family lived, and which it was the horses' duty to pull.

"Gypsies," whispered Mildred.

"A tinker, I think," Simon said. "They've been travelling over Ireland like this since the beginning of time."

The older man, who was seated in a folding canvas chair—undoubtedly a recent addition to the tinker's inventory of household goods—waved his hand toward the pot and said to the boy, "What's it now?"

The boy pulled a large thermometer from the liquid.

"Sixty three."

The older man turned to the adolescent girls.

"Put it in."

The two girls each picked up a small sack and dumped its contents into the mixture while the boy stirred with a long wooden stick.

"Is that. . .potheen?" Mildred asked Simon in a hushed voice.

"It must be. The most potent stuff this side of hellfire and brimstone. Let's go in quietly and peaceably, but not as if we're trying to sneak up. People who make illicit whiskey tend to shoot first and find out later whether their guests were revenue agents."

As he and Mildred first appeared in the wavering, golden light the boy looked up from the pot and shouted, "Hey!"

For a moment the whole tableau, was absolutely motionless. Even the heavy-necked horses seemed to sense the drama of the moment and froze in position. Then, like a squad of American football players shifting into a defensive formation, the whole family moved. The three women stood between the newcomers and the bubbling cauldron as the men stepped forward, the eldest first, the younger just behind. Simon and Mildred waited.

"They don't look friendly at all," said Mildred out of the corner of her mouth.

"They're not," the Saint said simply. "Now's a good chance for you to use your greatest talent. Think of some lie to make them love us."

Smiling pleasantly, he stepped forward toward the grim-visaged men.

"Good evening. Our car broke down on the lane. We saw your fire."

The older man squinted at him for a long moment, chewing on a splinter of wood. A cap, which looked as if it might never have been removed since it was first put on years before, effectively de-emphasized his cranium and eyes, and brought into full prominence the mushroom effulgence of his scarlet nose.

"Main road is behind ye," he said finally.

Mildred came to the rescue then. Her face suddenly went into contortions of pain, and she stood on one foot and clasped her arms around Simon's neck, letting him support her.

"I. . .was hurt," she gasped, "when our car went in the ditch."

She tried bravely to get her breath and stand straight again. Sympathetic glances were exchanged by various members of the tinker's party.

"What ye want, then?" the eldest woman asked.

"Somewhere to stay the night," Simon answered.

"This is not a hotel, mister," she said.

Simon went forward another step.

"We're nothing to do with the revenue, if that's what worries you," he said.

The women closed ranks in front of the pot.

"We're just fixin' ourselves a bit o' stew," the eldest said. "Shure and why would the revenue care about that one way or the other?"

"What are ye, then?" asked the younger man.

Mildred took over again, bursting excitedly into rapid speech.

"Please. . .we're running away from my stepfather to get married! He's a terrible man. He's already wasted away my mother's fortune, and he wants what little I have left. If he catches us he'll. . . We need your help—desperately!"

She broke off, sobbing violently.

"It's the truth is it?" asked the elder man.

"She's been under a terrible strain," Simon replied, avoiding any direct commitment as to Mildred's veracity.

The lead man had begun shifting uncertainly from foot to foot.

"Hould on," he said.

His entire group went into a huddle near the fire.

"We'll be glad to pay," Simon called, thus probably cutting several minutes off the secret discussion.

"Well now, tis all agreed," the man said, straightening up and

turning. "Ye can stay with pleasure, if ye don't mind the company of a tinker and his family.

He held out his calloused hand and Simon shook it.

"Delighted. And thank you very much."

"Me name is Muldoon," the tinker said. "And this is me wife. That's me boy Sean, and these are Tessa and Genevra."

"I'm Rick Fenton," Simon said, "and this is Mildred Kleinschmidt."

They went to the fire, where the boy, Sean, was stirring the pulpy liquid again. Mildred half closed her eyes and stepped back as some of the violently odoriferous steam drifted into her face.

"Delicious looking stew," the Saint said solemnly.

"It will be, when it's finished," said Muldoon, winking.

He pulled out the thermometer, looked, and dropped it back again.

"How would ye like a little of the finished product?"

"Fine," answered Simon politely. Then he added, with concealed relief, "But I'm afraid we won't be staying that long."

"Oh, we have a sample here from the last batch."

While Muldoon fetched the sample, his wife was questioning Mildred with great concern about her injuries and feeling her ankle for broken bones.

"Ye poor little bit of a thing," Mrs. Muldoon murmured, with a reproachful glance at Simon. "Runnin' away to be wed, and not even a pair o' decent shoes for yer feet."

Muldoon came around the fire with a large pickle jar. He unscrewed the cap.

"See what ye think of that."

Simon braced himself, tilted up the jar, and swallowed as little as possible. The effect on his tongue and mouth combined various qualities of iodine, gasoline, and molten lava. He was damp-eyed and speechless for a moment. Finally he found that some small remnant of his vocal apparatus had miraculously escaped destruction.

"Delicious," he said hoarsely, but with an expression no different from the one his face would have worn had he just been treated to a cup of Olympian ambrosia.

Muldoon beamed.

"Here, come on," Sean said crossly. "Me arm's dropping off."

Muldoon went to take a turn at stirring the cauldron.

"Tessa," he called, "go and fetch our guests somethin' to eat."

Simon unobtrusively separated some bills from the fold of money in his pocket and offered them to Muldoon.

"Here you are," he said, "And many thanks."

"Aw, it's too much," protested Muldoon, tucking the money into his shirt nevertheless. "Now why don't you and yer bride let me wife show ye yer quarters?"

Sean, who had walked off toward the horses and back again, aggrievedly rubbing his overworked stirring arm, suddenly stiffened and cried out.

"Hey, Dad!"

There at the edge of the clearing, their faces menacing in the dancing light, stood Mildred's hunters.

—6—

Simon's response was so prompt and inspirational that not even two seconds passed between Sean's cry and his own.

"Revenue men!" he yelled.

"The divil and it is!" roared Muldoon in outraged agreement.

He snatched his stirring stick out of the pot of potheen and charged across the clearing. His son charged too, grabbing up a makeshift cudgel from the heap of spare wood by the fire.

Simon's only worry was that the private detectives might have guns, but if they did they had no time to use them. Muldoon and Sean sailed in with sticks flying, and Mrs. Muldoon and her daughters armed themselves with cooking pots from a chest beside the nearest wagon and ran to join the fray.

Mildred, who had let out a little shriek as the battle commenced, stood as if petrified, her hand to her mouth. Simon, seeing that the beleaguered detectives were getting a sound enough drubbing without any help from him, ran to prod her into motion.

"It's time we were on the move again," he said, towing her into the woods in a direction opposite the one from which they had arrived at the tinker's camp. "Didn't a train pass over this way?"

"I don't remember," panted Mildred.

"Not very observant for a Queen's Guide."

They were out of range of the firelight, hurrying downhill, and Simon recognized the voice of one of the detectives above the melee.

"There! They ran over there!"

"I think your friends are after us," Simon said. "And the tink-

er's probably wondering what kind of revenue men those are, leaving behind a big pot of potheen to chase us."

Mildred had reached the limit of her strength by the time they emerged from the woods and stood on the level surface of a railroad embankment. The track came around a curve on their left and continued through a cut in the low hill to their right.

"I can't go on," Mildred gasped. "Let's just give up. Let them catch me."

"After all this trouble?" said the Saint. "Not on your life. I don't like losing even ridiculous games like this."

He held her hand, leading her along the tracks to the comparative shelter of the cut, where an irregular rocky face of earth rose up almost straight on either side.

"At least we're not out in open moonlight here," he said.

"What if a train comes along?"

"Then we'll be squashed." He met her shocked expression with a shrug. "It happens all the time to ants and caterpillars."

Mildred held a finger to her lips.

"Listen," she whispered. "I think they're here."

Simon heard the voices of two men in the woods not far away. Apparently the tinker and his tribe had been content to chase the detectives out of their camp, and then probably—confused as to whether they had been spotted by revenue agents or not—they would pack up and move on as soon as possible.

As Mildred and the Saint faced the track, their backs to the face of the cut, the detectives were searching along the edge of the forest to their left.

"Let's move away from them," Simon whispered. "Here—through the cut."

He and Mildred, keeping their bodies inconspicuously flattened against the low cliff, edged along the side of the track. The detectives' voices sounded louder. They had come out of the woods.

"Oh, no," moaned Mildred.

"What?" Simon asked.

"I think I hear a train."

"Yes. Exactly what I hoped?"

"Hoped? You said we'd be squashed!"

"Not if we're clever, agile. . .and lucky."

He was quiet as one of the detectives called to the other.

"I think they're hiding here somewhere. We'd have heard them running."

"Right!" replied the other. "You go on toward the cut. I'll

check this way. Wish we could just shoot the bloody pair of them and have done with it. I'm fed up, even for a hundred thousand quid."

"I'll *shut* you up, Finch, if you keep flapping your lip like that."

Simon looked at Mildred with slightly raised eyebrows.

"A hundred thousand?" he whispered. "Your father must love you very much."

"He's despicable. And. . .and I don't even know what anybody's talking about."

Simon mused aloud as he continued moving toward the other end of the cut.

"This case gets more interesting every minute."

"And that train's getting closer every second," said Mildred.

What had shortly before been a distant rumble beyond the curve to their left was now such a growing noise that it was no longer necessary to whipser.

"We'd better hurry," the Saint said.

Just at that moment, the fat man, nosing along near the rails outside the cut, spotted them and shouted the news to his partner. But just as he started to run in after them the sound of the train mounted toward a roar and the blazing, unsteady light of the engine swept around the curve a quarter of a mile away. The detective backtracked and ran up the hill along the edge of the cut, peering down to keep his eye on the Saint and Mildred.

"This way," said Simon.

No longer making any effort to hide what he was doing, he grabbed Mildred's hand and ran with her through the cut as the brilliant headlight of the train caught them in its beam. The fat detective saw that they were heading across the tracks to the opposite side of the cut. He screamed to the thin one, who was still on the ground which was level with the tracks.

"Get across there! They're going up the other side!"

The thin one made a dash toward the tracks then leaped back as he calculated that the engine would arrive abreast of his present location just as he arrived in front of the engine. The engineer, seeing people along the rails, applied brakes, but with no chance of even slowing appreciably before he was well past the cut.

The Saint had no intention of ending his shining career in so messy or pointless a way as being flattened by the Dublin-Galway express while helping a fluff-brained girl run away from her father—or whatever it was she was really doing. He made certain

that they got to the end of the cut ahead of the train, and then as the engine roared past, blaring infuriated warnings on its whistle, he dragged her up the lip of the cut opposite the fat detective, who could only watch, shouting and waving his arms.

He probably could scarcely even hear his own words, which were hopelessly swallowed in the click-clacking thunder of the passing carriages. The Saint waved at him pleasantly, bowed and tapped a greeting from his forehead. Then he took Mildred's hand.

"Get ready to jump," he said.

She stared at him, appalled.

"Jump?"

"Of course. This couldn't have been handier if we'd had it planned by a travel agent."

It was only three feet down to the moving tops of the cars and the train had just reached its minimum of speed brought on by the brakes.

"We'll stand back a little bit, then take a running jump," Simon said. "There'll be nothing to it—as long as you don't jump short and fall down between the train and the wall."

"I won't do it!" cried Mildred.

"Yes you will. Remember dear Rick. Get ready now. Last car."

The detectives, who were now together on the other side of the cut, sensed the Saint's intention and were getting ready to jump in case he did. That was why he waited until the last carriage was passing—and the last half of that—until he grasped Mildred's hand more firmly than ever, ran forward, and leaped.

When they landed, the Saint, like a cat, kept his balance, and for an instant was able to see the frustrated faces of the detectives not eight feet from his. Then they were left helplessly behind, watching the red warning lights on the rear of the train, like mocking eyes, disappear toward the southwest.

Simon sat down and made himself comfortable on the roof of the carriage. Mildred was lying down on her stomach, but once she caught her breath and got over the first fear of perching on top of a swaying, incredibly jolting train which appeared in danger of toppling off its rails at any moment, she also sat up cautiously and looked around.

"We'll stay here at the top of the ladder," said the Saint. "Then if we see a tunnel coming up we can climb down and get on the rear platform."

Mildred made a piteous groaning sound as she leaned slightly toward the edge of the roof and looked beyond the handrails of

the ladder at the ground blurring by near the train. The engine had picked up full speed again now, and the wheels clattered almost lightly on the track.

"I wouldn't climb down that for anything," she said.

Simon shrugged.

"Then you can just hope no tunnels come up."

Mildred covered her head with both hands.

"And this wind is ruining my hair! Why did I ever let you get me into this mess?"

Even to a man as hardened as the Saint was to human ingratitude, and especially to feminine foibles, Mildred's last question was rather hard to take, and he considered tossing her off into the first soft-looking ditch. But that would have been like throwing away a key piece of the puzzle which was just beginning to take shape.

He looked at her elfin face in the moonlight as they sailed past forests and sleeping cottages and wondered what the final truth about it would be. He no longer believed a word of what she had told him about herself, her family, or her plans, but there was no way to wring the truth from a slippery liar, who would scoot from any man's grasp like a wriggling fish. He would have to play along with her until one among the dark hunches in his mind moved into the light.

Maybe she was an exceptionally large and pretty female leprechaun. The thought amused and pleased him, because in Celtic legend a leprechaun, when caught, reveals a hidden treasure.

—7—

The final leg of the Saint's nocturnal odyssey with Mildred was prolonged but uncomplicated. At the town of Kildare they lay low on the roof of the carriage and no one saw them. From there the track turned briefly from southwest to west, and then bore northwest directly into the country between Lough Reagh and Lough Derg—two of the great Irish lakes—where Kelly lived. After less than twenty miles on the northwest course there was a stop at Tullamore, and after fifteen more miles they were at Athlone, on the lower end of Lough Reagh.

There, while the train was stopped, they climbed down between carriages and strolled away so nonchalantly that not even the brakeman, busy with his oil can, gave them a second glance as they passed.

They made the rest of the trip by taxi—an old and sagging conveyance whose driver apparently picked up a few extra shillings on off days by hauling pigs to market in the back seat. The driver was even older and more sagging than his cab, and he begrudged his passengers every mile he carried them. He had two desirable traits, however: he spoke not a word, and he knew the countryside down to the last compost heap and culvert. Though his response to Simon's rather uncertain directions was an ambiguous grunt, he took off along the dark, twisting lanes of the rural landscape like a horse on its way back to the barn for supper. In an amazingly fast ten miles he deposited them at the gate of a white, thatched cottage which stood alone in the midst of high hedges at the edge of some cleared fields. Simon recognized Kelly's car and knew they had come to a resting place at last.

The taxi driver took the payment and generous tip, looked at the bills and coins as if they were a handful of dead cockroaches, and rattled away toward town.

"What a lovely place," Mildred said. "I didn't know your friend was a farmer."

"In a small way," Simon answered.

He opened the gate and let Mildred go ahead.

"Pat Kelly used to be the kind of man who was never happy spending more than six months in any one place, but his wife blew the whistle on him after he almost got his head hacked off in the Congo, and now he seems to be pretty content."

The subject of their discussion opened his front door, and a wedge of light fell on Simon and Mildred.

"So here ye are at last!" bellowed Kelly.

"At last," Mildred sighed, dragging her way across the threshold.

"And where's yer car and all?" Kelly asked. "What happened at the hotel?"

The small living room of the cottage was made to seem even smaller by the amount of furniture and bric-a-brac crammed into it. Kelly's wife's interests were represented by china dolls, ornate clocks, and corner shelves laden with an indescribable assortment of glass and gold-leafed souvenirs—most of them bearing the word "souvenir" at some prominent point on their surface.

Kelly's mementoes were along martial or exotic lines: an antique sword, African spears, shrunken heads, and primitive shields and masks. Perhaps as a countermeasure against that heathen paraphenalia, there were also on the walls violently hued lithographs of the Sacred Heart and the Virgin Mary.

"It's a long story," Mildred said.

She collapsed into an overstuffed chair with such a show of exhaustion that Kelly immediately looked shamefaced and apologetic.

"Shure, and it's a poor way I'm behavin' to welcome ye after yer journey with a lot of questions. Sit down, Simon, and I'll fetch some rejuvenatin' potions from the supply I brought out with me from Dublin."

Simon's stamina was remarkable, but he had nothing against a little relaxation at that point. It was after one o'clock – time enough to call it a day. He sank into one of the chairs opposite Mildred, stretched, and let his muscles go comfortably limp. Kelly, who had gone out through a dining alcove to the kitchen, came back with several bottles grasped by their necks in one of his massive hands, and the glasses held in the other.

"We may go hungry, but never thirsty," he said, "and that's the important thing." He set the bottles and glasses on a low table and began to pour. "Did ye know that a man can go weeks without eatin' but all it takes is a few days without liquid, and. . ."

He snapped his fingers expressively. Then he turned to hand Mildred her filled glass and saw that she had fallen asleep. Her head had flopped to one side, and her mouth was half open. She looked about fourteen years old.

"The poor girl," Kelly whispered, turning to the Saint with another glass. "What have ye been doin' to her?"

Simon looked at her windblown hair, her smudged face, her dusty suit, her now shoeless feet, and her run stockings.

"You might ask what she's been doing to me."

"What then, man? I'm on pins and needles. Have the Nazis taken over the west of Ireland? They can have the north and be welcome to it, but if they come here. . ."

"The Hitler's daughter routine is a thing of the past," Simon said.

Then he paused, looking suspiciously at Mildred's childlike face.

"Before I tell you, is there a bed for her?"

"Shure. Me daughter's room. Let's put her there. And you can have what me wife is fond of callin' the guest room, only till now there's never been a guest near it. There's a lot of spare gear, but I think we can clear a path to the bed."

Simon stood up and went to touch Mildred's shoulder. She did not stir even when he spoke her name, so he scooped her into

his arms and carried her as Kelly led the way to a little bedroom.

"Do ye think she might be a lot more comfortable without all them clothes on?" Kelly asked wistfully, when Simon had put her on the bed.

Simon steered his friend out of the door and into the hall.

"She might be," he said, "but it might have the opposite effect on you."

"I don't suppose *you'd* care," Kelly sulked, "havin' been with her the better part of the night already."

They were back in the living room, and Simon smiled as they sat down and picked up their glasses.

"If that was the better part of the night," he said, "I hate to think what the worst part has in store."

"Well, have mercy and tell me what happened, would ye, before I split a blood vessel."

Simon leaned forward and lowered his voice, jerking his head in the direction of Mildred's sleeping-room.

"There's just one thing," he said. "Do you have a telephone?"

Kelly nodded.

"Amazing as it may seem, we do. And light, as ye can see. But no runnin' water unless ye make it run by the strength of yer arm. Who'd ye want to call at this hour?"

"Nobody. But whatever you do, keep Mildred away from it."

Kelly sat back impatiently and gulped at his drink.

"Now for heaven's sake why is that?"

"Because every time I shake those two men who're following her, they show up again faster than. . ."

"The SS, you mean?" Kelly interrupted.

"Except they're not SS. According to her latest bulletin they're private detectives hired by her father to catch her and bring her home before she can get married to some American actor."

"And who' might her father be this time?"

"For the moment, Eugene Drew."

Kelly looked enlightened, and amazed.

"The rich fella," he said. "It's like a holy miracle, but I just looked at tomorrow's paper I bought in the village and me eye fell on that story. A little squib in the back: rumored that Eugene Drew's daughter has run away again—or somethin' to that effect."

"Was that all it said?" the Saint asked.

"It was only a couple of lines," Kelly's voice became alarmed.

"But Simon, you helpin' a runaway—and she here in me own house! It's a dangerous game to be playin' and for no good reason. And what's this about detectives findin' her, and her and the telephone and all? Shure and she's not callin' the very people she wants to get away from and tellin' them where she is! She may be crazy, but that's carryin' insanity to obnoxious extremes."

The Saint's calmness was a marked contrast to Kelly's excitement.

"I wouldn't discount any possibility right now," he said. "They knew I had a room at the hotel when they shouldn't even have known my name. They caught up with us outside Dublin when they shouldn't have had the faintest idea which way we were going."

"Maybe she's got one o' them homin' devices planted on her," Kelly suggested. "I saw a film last week where they put some pin in this man's lapel, and then they could know where he was no matter. . ."

Simon grinned and shook his head.

"There's no need to make it so complicated," he said. "Nothing has happened that can't be explained by a little behind the scenes use of the common telephone."

Kelly jumped to his feet impatiently and poured himself a fresh shot of whiskey.

"There ye' are again—back to her and the telephone. If I've got a lunatic—or maybe two—under me roof, I'd at least like to know how she—or they—came to be here, so fill me in as directly as ye can."

By the time Simon had given a strictly factual account of everything that had happened from the time he had left Kelly in the Gresham Grill until he and Mildred had arrived at Kelly's cottage door, it was late enough that he definitely preferred sleep to the Irishman's exotic speculations as to the truth behind the events.

"Let's sleep on it, Pat," the Saint said, getting to his feet. "The best thing you can do is see that Mildred doesn't use the phone or leave your house."

"Ye talk as if ye won't be here," said Kelly.

"Well, my car—or what's left of it—is sitting with a bent axle in the woods somewhere west of Lucan. If you don't mind, I'll borrow your car and drive back there to see about having it towed out and repaired. I'm afraid I'd never get much action if I just telephoned. They'd probably want my personal authorization to take it, and it's in a pretty obscure spot."

"Ye're welcome to me car," Kelly said, "but we could all go if you like."

"I have a feeling you and Mildred will both be asleep, and I'd like to get an early start. Anyway, I'm afraid if we once let her out of the house we'll mysteriously find that her chums are on our trail again."

"But Simon, me boy, we can't be holdin' her prisoner, and why should we? I mean, it isn't us that's runnin' away with her—and if me wife should come home unexpectedly and find her here, it'd be. . ."

"I'll back up your story," said the Saint. "And before I turn in I'll explain what I have in mind. If Mildred's story is on the level, she'll be glad to hole up here till it's time for me to meet her boyfriend at the airport. She'd be a fool to show her face anywhere until the very last minute. Right?"

Kelly nodded his shaggy red head.

"Now," Simon continued, "if she's not telling the truth, and if she *is* the one keeping the hounds hot on her own trail, then the whole show must be for somebody else's benefit."

Kelly was swaying uncertainly on his feet, frowning in the intensity of his effort to understand what Simon was saying. He had drunk the entire contents of at least one of the bottles.

"Benefit," he mumbled vaguely. "Whose benefit?"

"So far you and I are the only audience I know anything about," the Saint replied.

"Ye mean it's all a big joke?"

"No. I think it's possibly a big show with a starring role written in for me. And since I'm one of the leading characters I just want to be sure there's going to be a happy ending."

"Ye've lost me," said Kelly.

"Well, ponder on it," Simon said, "and by morning I'm sure you'll have come up with some of the same possibilities I have."

"It'll do me no earthly good to ponder at all," Kelly said, showing the way to Simon's room. "Me wife says I'm good for nothin' but fightin' and drinkin' and sometimes I'm inclined to believe her."

"You may have a chance to prove she's right about the fighting if Mildred's detective friends show up tomorrow."

Kelly grunted.

"Listen—even the postman can't find this place, let alone a couple of city yobbos like them. And if they do get here. . ."

He raised his fist expressively.

"That should discourage them," Simon said. "Hold down the fort Pat, and if I'm gone when you get up I should be back by mid-afternoon."

The next morning went according to the Saint's plans. He needed no alarm clock to guarantee that he would wake up by a certain hour. He told himself before he fell asleep that he wanted to be awake at nine, and when he opened his eyes to the sun his wristwatch told him that his mental timer had been accurate almost to the minute. A short while later he was on the road that ran through Mullingar to Kilcock, about sixty miles from Kelly's house. As he drove through the beautiful countryside, admiring the red and purple fuchsia against the whitewashed walls of cottages, he thought of the fishing he might be enjoying at this moment. Somehow or other he was going to extract a compensatory reward from this adventure, even if it took selling Mildred to an Arab slaver.

There were no more complications than might have been expected involved in having his car retrieved from the wilderness. He showed a towing truck from Kilcock the way, and the job was done in short order. The repair of the axle would take overnight, he was told, since parts would have to be obtained from Dublin. So he transferred his luggage from the trunk of his injured car to the trunk of Kelly's, had a simple but decent lunch at a Kilcock hostelry, and drove back the same way he had come earlier.

It was after four when he stopped in front of Kelly's cottage. The vine-covered gate was standing open. The door of the cottage was open a few inches also. In the living room, several pieces of furniture were overturned, one of the wooden African masks was broken in half and a Zulu assegai was embedded in the sofa. There was no blood, at least, and there were no bullet holes.

On the nail in the wall where the primitive mask had hung was a note on white paper. Simon took it down and read it.

> *Saint:*
> *We have your friend and Mildred Drew. Tell Eugene Drew that if he wants to see her alive he must give you a hundred thousand pounds which you must deliver to us tomorrow night at the crossing marked on the map below at nine o'clock. Come alone. Your friend won't be hurt*

if you cooperate, and neither will the girl. Otherwise we'll kill them.

—8—

Eugene Drew turned from the floor lamp and looked at the Saint with his uncommonly large and protuberant eyes. Then he turned back, held the note in the direct light of the bulb, and read it again.

It was nine o'clock in the evening of the same day on which Simon had plucked the note down from a nail on the wall of Kelly's cottage. Arranging to see Drew had been momentarily difficult because the man was obsessed with the notion that nine tenths of the newspaper reporters on earth were devoting themselves exclusively to scheming ways of invading his privacy. But Drew knew of Simon Templar by reputation, and there was also the note, as concrete evidence.

Still, the financier had made no secret of his mistrust when he admitted the Saint to his suite at the Gresham. He had stood there tall and slope-shouldered in a grey tweed suit much too heavy for the season, and with a total absence of cordiality or even politeness held out his hand.

"The note," he had said.

Simon, with no greater display of warmth, had given it to him.

Now Drew, after the second reading, turned from the lamp and placed the paper on a table. He gave it a final glance and looked at the Saint, who had made himself comfortable in an armchair.

"You believe this note was left by the detectives I hired to find my daughter?" Drew asked.

"I'm reasonably sure of it. But it doesn't really matter, does it? The problem is the same, whoever the kidnapper is."

Drew paused, made a grunting sound of assent, and paced toward the window.

"I'm paying Brine and Mullins—the detectives—a salary much higher than they would normally be paid, and I promised them a large bonus if they were successful. Why should they risk everything, including their freedom, for. . ."

He stopped, shook his head, clasped his hands behind him, and paced again.

"Maybe they don't have so much to risk," Simon said. "A private detective's pay wouldn't make a truck driver very envious. Maybe once you gave them a whiff of higher things they just

couldn't resist the temptation to try for the jackpot. I assume your bonus didn't approach a hundred thousand pounds."

"Of course not," Drew snapped. "After all, she's just a silly little child running off to try to ruin her life with some long-haired nincompoop of an actor. There was no reason why I should offer a queen's ransom to anybody just for tracing her. I offered more than I might have because when Brine and Mullins came to me and said they had a clue as to her whereabouts. . ."

"The detectives came to you?" Simon interrupted.

"Yes. When Mildred disappeared I began putting out quiet feelers immediately. Brine and Mullins got wind of what was happening and came and told me that they believed they could return my daughter within forty-eight hours—and without publicity. They asked a stiff price, but it seemed worth it."

"Well," said the Saint, "if they were honest in the first place, it would seem they got carried away by the heat of the hunt and decided to go crooked. I'll have to admit we were leading them a merry chase there for a while."

"And that's something else, Mr. Templar," Drew said, glaring at him. "Your summary of events on the telephone failed to explain just what you were doing with my daughter in the first place."

"If you had been listening closely, you'd recall I said she insinuated herself into my good graces by telling lies. To be specific—that she was Hitler's daughter and that your detectives were SS men."

Drew all but spat on the floor.

"That's preposterous!"

"Don't blame me for weak points in Mildred's upbringing. And just keep in mind that even though I was clever enough to surmise that she wasn't really Hitler's daughter, I had no way of knowing whose daughter she really was. By the time she confessed, we were a long way from Dublin."

"Why didn't you call me immediately, as soon as you knew who she was?"

Drew's imperious tone irritated Simon, who sat quietly for a moment, the sapphire points of his eyes fixed penetratingly and coldly on the other man's face.

"Remember, Mr. Drew, I'm not one of your hired lackeys. Your daughter—probably accurately—made you sound like a selfish ogre. I saw no reason to stop her doing anything she pleased."

Drew glowered for a moment longer, then turned angrily away. The Saint got to his feet.

"Now," he said, "are you going to pay up, or lose one of your tax deductions the hard way?"

Drew's face was now more apprehensive than angry.

"You don't think they'd. . .actually kill her?"

"I'm afraid unsuccessful kidnappers are more dangerous than successful ones."

"What guarantee do I have that they'll return her even if I do pay the money?"

Simon shrugged.

"None. That's one reason why I consider kidnapping one of the more nauseating crimes in the human repertoire. But if you don't pay, the odds are something like fifty to one in favor of their killing Mildred. If you do, then naturally Brine and Mullins would rather look forward to enjoying their fifty thousand pounds apiece without a murder rap hanging over their heads. I'd advise you to pay."

"Naturally," Drew said, hardening his tone again. "Naturally you would. The note conveniently specifies that you and only you may bring the money. Let's assume that you are not a part of this plot. That assumption may be erroneous, but for the sake of argument. . ."

Simon held up his hand and gave Drew a look of cold contempt.

"I was afraid you might make such nasty insinuations," he said levelly. "So, to demonstrate my sincerity, I'll simply remove my self from the whole situation and let you worry about it."

He stepped toward the door. Drew moved after him quickly, his face showing sudden panic.

"No. . . Wait. I. . . I apologize. "

The Saint turned back, his expression only slightly softer, making it plain that he was not quite sure that the apology was adequate.

"What were you saying then?"

Drew opened his mouth, paused, and closed it again.

"Ah. . . I'm not sure," he said.

"I think I can read your mind," said the Saint. "You were going to ask what would prevent me from setting off for the crossroads with your money and going straight on to Brazil without even slowing down."

"It's a natural thought," Drew said, with a conspicuous lack of

the truculence his voice had carried a few moments before.

"I suppose it is, for the kind of man who would do it," Simon responded pleasantly. "But I'm not that sort of man. And besides, they have an old friend of mine along with your daughter, and I wouldn't like to be responsible for his being hurt. Does that reassure you?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll have the money by tomorrow night?"

Drew nodded.

"Yes. Where will I find you?"

"I'll be staying here tonight and for the day tomorrow. I'm getting tired of covering the road between Dublin and Lough Reagh. At four tomorrow afternoon I'll come to your suite here and pick up the cash. Then if everything goes well, Mildred and my friend will be free before midnight."

"All right," said Drew. "I'll have to trust you."

Simon paused at the door.

"Yes. You should. Don't try to follow me or have me followed. It may seem like a smart idea at first thought, but if Brine and Mullins suspected anything they might bolt before I could pay them—and possibly they'd do something drastic on their way out."

"It'll be in your hands then," Drew said.

For the first time he showed signs of letting his tenderer emotions get control of him. His huge eyes moistened and his mouth threatened to tremble.

"And. . .tell Mildred," he mumbled, "that who she marries is her own business, if that's how it has to be. I won't stand in the way."

"I'll deliver the message. It seems like a wise one."

The Saint looked at Drew more intently. His final request, toward which it might be said that all the earlier part of his conversation had been secretly building, would have to be phrased in such a way as to arouse no suspicions. To slip now would be like settling weight on a false footing just inches before reaching the top of a precipice.

"There's just one thing I'm curious about," he said.

"What?" Drew asked.

"You're very concerned about who has captured your daughter, and all about my character. I'm sure you'll have me checked out thoroughly before I get my hands on that money tomorrow. The one thing you haven't thought to ask is whether or not the kidnappers have your daughter."

Drew was obviously taken aback. He looked a bit like a schoolboy caught in a ridiculous arithmetical error.

"Well," he said defensively, "Brine and Mullins are far overdue in contacting me—which seems to confirm your story. My daughter, after all, *is* missing. And you're so anxious for me to trust in your honesty: it was you who was with her, and who told me you left her in the house where you found the note. I don't even understand what you mean, now. . ."

"I mean," said Simon, "that I have never seen your daughter—before yesterday. Do you have a picture of her?"

Drew seemed flabbergasted that the Saint would bring up such a crucial question of identification at that late moment.

"Yes," he said. "I brought this with me in case I had to ask the police to put out a public alarm."

He went into the bedroom which adjoined the living room of the suite and returned with a large photograph in his hand.

Simon took it and studied it. Then he smiled.

"Yes," he said, taking a last satisfied look. "That settles it."

—9—

The fat man called Brine sat in an old Austin Healey at the crossing of two unpaved roads six miles from the village of Birr. It was two minutes before nine o'clock, and though the man must have been tired, since he could have had little sleep in the past twenty-four hours, he was as alert as a sentry on the border of enemy territory. His head jerked toward the direction of the slightest sound, and the Saint was sure that his hand must never be far from the ignition key, so that he could start the engine and be off at the first threat of danger.

So the Saint, who was crouched in the trees just behind Brine's car, had to be very quiet. The night was cloudy and thus exceptionally dark. That was one advantage. Another advantage was the mild but gusty wind which had come along with the cloudy weather. The noises it caused in the branches of trees and bushes would continually distract Brine and also tend to cover any sounds the Saint might make. Simon could have made do without those advantages, but their existence was convenient and seemed a good omen.

He crept forward like a stalking leopard into the road behind the car, carrying something in one hand which might have been even more alarming to Brine than a gun, had Brine been able

to see it. It was a large can of white paint—a half gallon—with a strip of adhesive tape in the middle of both the top and the bottom.

When he had reached the rear of the car, Simon deftly and silently hooked the handle of the paint can over one of the bumper guards. Then he pulled the strips of tape from the top and bottom. Under each piece of tape was a small hole, and white paint began to drip slowly but regularly on to the dark earth of the road.

With as little sound as he had made in coming, the Saint moved away from the automobile and melted into the murky forest like a passing shadow.

When he was a safe distance from Brine, he quickened his pace and quickly covered the two hundred yards of woods which separated the Austin Healey from his own car. He had arrived in the area before Brine and parked in an obscure little lane which was visible from neither of the roads which formed the crossing marked on the crude map the kidnappers had left behind at Kelly's house. Now that his private mission with the can of paint was finished, it was a simple matter to start his engine, drive down to the crossroads, and arrive just on time for the meeting.

His car was facing Brine's when he drove up, and in the glare of his own lights he could see Brine gesturing for him to drive alongside. Apparently the erstwhile detective wanted to keep the road ahead clear for a fast getaway, and also had no intention of leaving the security of the driver's seat of his car.

Simon stopped so that his open window was less than two feet from Brine's. He was greeted with a dim view of Brine's pudgy face and the snout of a revolver.

"Got the money?" Brine asked nervously.

Simon remaining in his car, picked up the attache case which Drew had given him in the afternoon and handed it out through his window. Brine took it, dropped it onto the seat beside him, and kept his eye and gun on the Saint while his free hand fumbled with the latch. A few seconds later he held a handful of neatly stacked and banded bills alongside the gun, so that he could check their genuineness without dropping his guard. Then he put them back and inspected another handful. Obviously he was too nervous even to think of counting to see if the correct amount was there.

"This better be right," he said. "Any tricks and it's too bad."

"It's good money," the Saint said lightly. "I wouldn't mind having some of it myself."

Brine snorted.

"Give me your car key," he said.

Simon took the key from the ignition and handed it to Brine, who promptly threw it off into the bushes.

"Now, Mr. Brine," said the Saint with mild reproach, "that isn't very original. But at least it shows you learn by example. How long did you have to dive in that river the other day before you found yours?"

"I haven't any time for talking, Templar."

Brine started his car.

"What about Mildred and Kelly?" Simon asked.

"They'll be let loose somewhere near a telephone." He grinned. "Now if I were you I'd start hunting for that key."

He pulled quickly away as Simon leaned down, tore a strip of tape from a niche under the dashboard, and inserted one of his spare keys into the ignition. The satisfaction he got from reaping the benefit of that bit of foresight was minor compared to his relief at seeing—when he flicked on his headlights and turned around—the spots of white paint clearly marking the route by which Brine's car had disappeared.

Simon set a rate of speed which he felt would keep Brine from widening the gap between them. The white spots turned onto a paved road which led south for several miles, and then turned off into the woods again. The spots were difficult to see on the rocky lane, but it did not really matter since once on that particular pathway it would have been too impossible for a car to deviate to one side or the other without leaving behind a swathe of broken undergrowth.

A little further on the woods became more sparse, and the crude road wound up the side of a hill. At the top of the hill was one of those broken-down castles which do so much to enhance the beauty of Irish tourist brochures. Simon could see its single round tower black against the shredded clouds of the faintly luminous sky. With the lights of his car off, he drove to the edge of a grove which was within easy walking distance of the castle, but was far enough away that no one on top of the hill could have heard the sound of his engine nor the careful opening and closing of the door.

The Saint stood for a minute looking up the slope at the crumbled heap of stone. If Brine or his partner had discovered the

paint can on the bumper of the car, there could be trouble. The run up to the castle could be diversionary, and Simon would find that the white spots of paint led right off down the other side. That would mean, at the least, the loss of precious time. Worse, if Brine was on to the fact that he was being tailed, he could be lying in ambush somewhere among the broken walls above. But The Saint preferred to think that luck would stay with him. There was, after all, no logical reason for Brine to walk around and take a look at the rear of his car.

Simon chose the most direct path up the hill which offered a little cover in the form of scattered bushes and occasional low infrequent sections of an ancient stone wall. Probably stones from this wall as well as from the castle were a part of many a hearth in this neighborhood: the peasantry of all countries tended to regard noble relics of the past as no more than convenient quarries for common use.

There were few trees on the upper part of the hill. In fact, now that Simon had covered two thirds of the distance between his car and the castle there was only one gnarled trunk breaking the open ground. He ran silently to it, then stopped in its shadow and looked at the ruins, which were now less than a hundred and fifty feet away. There was no trace of light escaping the gloom of the walls, and he could hear nothing except the wind.

He took the pistol from the holster under his left arm and moved on more cautiously than ever, covering the last stretch so quickly and soundlessly that even if someone had glimpsed him he might have been taken for an illusion of the night.

He was at the outer wall of the castle now. It had never been a large establishment. As in the case of most such places of any real antiquity, the tower had been built first—and built to last despite the neighboring lord's most vigorous efforts to knock it down. The peasants, in their search for chimney-stones, had not fared much better than the besiegers of former times. The tower still stood almost unscathed while the rest of the structure, built later with the knowledge that the old donjon could be used as the ultimate in defense, lay mostly fallen about it in heaps of rubble.

Simon went around one of the traces of wall and stopped suddenly, slipping behind a half-collapsed archway. There was Brine's car, no one in it, with the paint can still dripping from the bumper. From the tower just beyond the car there came an unmistakable mutter of voices. The Saint circled, keeping himself out

of sight, until he could see light through an arrow-slit window. Then he moved in and had a cautious look.

What he saw in the room at the base of the tower would have been enough to cause at least a temporary paralysis of the breathing mechanism in a man of less prescience.

The chamber was lighted with a kerosene lantern. Kneeling on the floor was Brine, flicking open the catch of the attache case which Simon had given him. Standing alongside was the thin detective, Mullins, showing large facial bruises which must have been a result of his encounter with the tinker and his family the night before. Brine bore some of the same marks.

This much of the lurid spectacle of thieves eagerly salivating as they prepared to inspect their spoils was not unusual or shocking. But there was a third person present: Mildred. She was standing next to Mullins, not with the air of a languishing princess, nor even with the tearfully grateful air of a formerly languishing princess who has just been ransomed. She was leaning forward with the look of a kitten about to be fed, and when Brine opened the case and grinned as he held up a double handful of fivers, she fell onto her knees beside him and hugged him around the neck.

"Oh, Dad!" she said, "I can't believe we really did it!" She was mixing laughter with her words, and even the sullen thin man smiled until he stretched a split lip and winced as he covered his mouth with one hand.

"Well, now, Phyllis," said Brine proudly, clapping the case shut again, "you've proven you're a chip off the old block this time. Your mother would have been proud of you."

Mullins shook his head nostalgically.

"True enough. What a pity Moll couldn't have been here to see this."

Brine indulged in a moment of sadness, then shook off the feeling.

"Well, well," he said. "We must let the dead bury the dead. And that goes for Simon Templar, too."

That remark produced a laugh from the two men, but ex-Mildred, now Phyllis, looked worried.

"You didn't hurt him?" she asked.

"Oh, no. But when Drew's daughter doesn't show up it'll be the Saint left holding the bag. Or holding nothing, I might say."

He laughed again.

"What about his pal?" asked Mullins.

The Saint confronts Mullins, Mildred and Brine (See page 56)

They all looked toward a closed door so thick and so heavy with metal bindings that even the centuries had not brought it down from its massive hinges.

"Leave him, of course," shrugged Brine.

"We can't," Phyllis said. "He'd never get out, and he'd starve to death."

Brine clicked his tongue.

"Ah, Phyllis, I must warn you that your mother Moll was undone by that same sort of sentimentality. She was the only woman ever arrested in the Seaman's Home while putting money *back* in a man's trousers when she found he had eight hungry children. Of course they never believed her story." He looked around the chamber and concluded absently, "I'm not sure I ever believed it myself."

Mullins picked up a short length of rusted iron from the floor.

"This has a point on it," he said. "He can use it to work his way out."

"All right, then," Brine agreed impatiently, "but hurry it up, would you?"

Mildred threw the bolt on the door.

"Now don't you try anything," Brine called to the prisoner. "I'll have a gun on you. Mullins is going to throw you a little something you can chip your way out of there with in a couple of days if you work hard at it."

Simon did not get a look at Pat Kelly as Mildred opened the door a crack and Mullins tossed in the piece of metal, but he did hear his friend's voice, and it sounded gratifying robust and healthy.

"Ye bunch of crosseyed orangoutangs! Let me out of here and I'll fix ye up with yer legs around yer necks so ye can see behind when ye walk!"

He went on in the same vein even after his words were muffled by the door slamming again. Simon, meanwhile, moved around the outside of the tower until he came to the entrance, which was a doorless irregular hole that led directly into the chamber he had watched through the window. He waited until Phyllis picked up the lantern and turned with Brine and Mullins to leave. Then he showed himself, lounging easily, automatic in hand, between them and freedom.

"Hello, friends," he said, with a pleasant smile.

Phyllis was the first to recover her voice.

"Simon! How did you. . .ever find me?"

"Your latest father left a trail," he answered.

"What trail?" demanded Brine.

"Father?" cried Phyllis uncomprehendingly.

"Oh, Mildred Phyllis Hitler Drew Brine," said the Saint with indulgent sadness, "I'm afraid you've come to the bottom of the name barrel. Somewhere at the core of all those lies there had to be a truth, and we might as well agree we've found it."

"He's been listening to us talk here," Mullins said.

"Wonderful deduction," said the Saint. "I can see how you became such a successful detective. Too bad you made such an unsuccessful crook."

Brine was licking his lips nervously, glancing at his daughter and Mullins.

"Templar," he blurted. "You're in this with us. You deserve a share. We'll split." He smiled hopefully. "How's that?"

"I agree that I deserve a share," Simon said. "Let's say something like a hundred percent. I might send you a Christmas pudding in prison, though, if you'll tell me just when you decided to include me in your plans. Was it before or after you conned Drew into thinking you were on his daughter's trail?"

"You wouldn't believe it," Mullins said, "but we really were on to her trail—the real Mildred Drew's, I mean. So we made that deal with Drew to find her."

"And then you couldn't produce," volunteered the Saint, "so you decided to find a substitute Mildred."

"That was all my idea," Phyllis said proudly, looking no less ingenuously wide-eyed than she had in her role of millionaire's daughter. "And since they couldn't get anything for a Mildred who wasn't a Mildred, they had to pretend to kidnap her and get the money that way."

"And you needed a go-between who didn't know Mildred," Simon said. "Some innocent sucker who'd think he was serving everybody's best interests by carrying messages and money."

"Right!" said Phyllis brightly.

Brine's pride in the scheme was more apologetic.

"Of course we didn't plan to bring you into it till we just happened to hear your friend mention your name at a bar. Then we spotted you in the hotel, and. . ."

"And set up that performance where I was fishing," said the Saint.

Brine and Mullins both nodded.

"The whole thing sort of. . .developed, you might say," Mullins put in. "No offense intended. "

"We never went wrong before," said Brine hopefully. "We were always straight, going toward our old age grinding through divorce investigations for twenty quid a week. I. . . I guess the temptation was just too much."

"That might bring a tear to my eye," Simon said, "if I hadn't already used up my sympathy on Mildred's romantic problems. Now open the door there, and let my friend out."

Pat Kelly's last outburst had died away after the reclosing of the heavy door, and it seemed doubtful that he could have heard what had been going on since. Mullins looked apprehensively at the door.

"He's. . .ah. . .pretty mad," he said.

"Well, you won't mind that," said Simon. "Just throw the bolt and stand back. And Brine, you slide that case very gently across the floor in this direction."

Brine hesitated, but the Saint gave him an encouraging waggle of his revolver, and then the detective obediently sent the attache case scooting toward the exit. Mullins, in the meantime, with the tremulous caution of a demolition trainee defusing his first live

bomb, was drawing back the bolt that held Pat Kelly prisoner.

That was when Phyllis dropped the lantern. The instant it shattered on the floor the wick went out and the place was blindingly dark. In the confusion of sounds and physical sensations, the Saint was aware that Pat had apparently charged out of his dungeon with such force and velocity that the massive door had swung wide and crashed back against the wall. It also seemed, judging from the accompanying crunch and groan, that Mullins had perhaps been flattened between the door and the wall like a hapless beetle caught in the pages of a rapidly slamming dictionary.

Simon yelled to identify himself to Kelly, and at the same time sensed from the shape of the bulk heaving itself at him out of the blackness that he was being attacked by Brine. He neatly sidestepped and tripped the fat man, whose impetus carried him sprawling to the floor.

"Simon!" Kelly was shouting. "Where are ye?"

"Grab the girl," Simon said. "Do you have a match?"

Kelly quickly produced a flame, which revealed two men unconscious on the floor, but no Phyllis. There was also no attache case.

"She must have run out while I was tending to Brine," Simon said. "You watch these goons. I'll catch her."

He hurried through the door, dodged around piles of stone, and heard the sound of the girl's running steps in the direction of the car. But he was too close behind to allow her any chance of starting the engine and pulling away. He had a glimpse of her jumping over some rocks and setting off at a dead run down the hillside.

Before he had chased her far she made the mistake of looking back over her shoulder to see whether or not he was gaining. She stumbled and fell violently head first, rolling several times but never loosing her grip on the case clutched against her chest.

She was lying face up, gasping for breath, when Simon arrived at her side.

"Hurt yourself?" he asked.

"My back," she moaned. "It's. . .I think it's broken."

"They'll put it right for you in the prison hospital," the Saint said sympathetically.

He bent down to help her, and she winced with pain as she started to raise herself. Simon saw the sudden movement of her right arm and averted his face to avoid most of the handful of

earth she flung at him. Even so she managed to roll away, and dash off again. This time, though, he caught her before she had gone twenty feet and swung her around, making her drop the attache case, and pinning her arms behind her.

"You want the money for yourself!" she cried. "You're no better than the rest of us. In fact you're worse."

"Worse?" asked Simon mildly.

"Yes." Phyllis's big eyes suddenly welled with tears. "They... forced me to do it."

"How?"

"My mother. She needs this dreadful operation. There's only one surgeon in the world who can do it. In America. And he charges ten thousand pounds."

The Saint threw back his head and laughed.

"It's *true!*" said Phyllis. "Really."

"I'm afraid the stage lost a great star when you decided on a life of crime."

Phyllis looked more genuinely upset than she had a moment before.

"Simon," she said, "you wouldn't...really turn me in would you?"

"Oh, yes. You're a very naughty girl."

Her face crumpled, wet-eyed and kittenish.

"Please! I won't do anything wrong ever again, I swear. If you'll just let me go."

Kelly was hallooing from the top of the hill, unable as yet to see where they were. Simon looked at Phyllis and loosened his grip.

"You promise you'll live a clean and decent life, devoting yourself to good works and never telling any lies?"

"Oh, I do! I promise!"

"All right, then."

He let her go entirely. She was unbelieving.

"You mean?"

"Go on," he said.

She stood on her tiptoes, gave him a swift kiss, and turned to run. As she passed the attache case she snatched it up and took off down the hill like a rabbit.

"Don't try to spend any of that money, though," Simon called after her. "It's counterfeit!"

She stopped and turned.

"What did you say?" she shouted through clenched teeth.

"It's all counterfeit. Just bait to get your father to lead me here."

The word she said then was not so impressive as the way she said it. She took the attache case and hurled it to the ground. Then she ran and disappeared among the trees.

Simon went and knelt by the case, which had fallen open, spilling bundles of money—quite genuine Irish money—out on the ground. He made certain estimates of the value of his time, the expense of repairs to his car, and other worthy considerations, and stowed away what some less generous people might have considered a disproportionate number of the bundles of bills in his jacket pockets. But the Saint was an extraordinarily generous man, and he saw no reason to make an exception when being generous with himself.

Pat was coming down the hill.

"Are ye alone?" he called. "Couldn't ye catch her?"

The Saint closed the attache case and went to meet his friend.

"She's still running," he answered.

"Ah, well, and I'm not sorry," said Pat. "She was a darlin' little thing. Led astray by her ould man." He gestured toward the castle. "Them's the two buzzards I'd like to take apart."

"Are they all right?"

"They're trussed up so they couldn't give a flea any trouble. I've a throat as dry as a Bedouin's wit. What say we leave'm there to stew while we go get a spot o' somethin' to ease the pain?"

"We'd better bring them along," Simon said. "I'd like to get in touch with Drew before he decides I've made off with the loot."

"I wonder where his real daughter is?"

"I did some checking, and it seems she definitely flew to Mexico the day she disappeared from home. By now she's probably enjoying her honeymoon."

"While we have our few days o' peace and freedom ruined chasin' after her all over Ireland," said Kelly. "Well, maybe we can get in a day o' fishin' anyway." He scratched his chin, and gave Simon a sly sidelong glance. "Still an' all, it's too bad that colleen Mildred, or Phyllis, or whativer her name really is, turned out to be such a naughty one. I'm thinkin' ye might have had more fun with her than with me."

The Saint grinned pensively at the moon.

"It's a small world," he said cheerfully. "Maybe, one of these days I will."

hallie's gravestone

by Elsa Marshall

Coralie Tolley pushed open the old screened porch door to dip from the rain barrel by the back steps. It was a big green oil drum, only half full, and she had to lean down right far to fill her bucket. Then she emptied it into the ancient wringer washer near the kitchen doorway. Steam clouds billowed up from the hot water that was already inside. She'd lugged about a zillion gallons, seemed like, from the roaring iron range in the kitchen. All to wash the Old Man's overalls and her extra jeans, along with a faded India print cover from the parlor sofa and a bunch of Emma Sue's stuff. Coralie flipped the switch and the old wreck groaned; then an awful clatteration and thumping began. She stepped back to watch with hands on her round, blue jeaned hips.

Maybe it beat scrubbing but be danged if she'd swear to it. Lord knows they ought to have running water by

Elsa Marshall returns with a story from the hills which few of us know, where the ways of life are different from those "down the mountain" where "city folks" live, and where both old and young, indifferent to and not knowing our fears, live in another time and era, fearing other shadows. . .

now, the way the Old Man had talked before she married him a year ago: "Done got the electricity and a good well. I can easy find a second hand pump."

But after the wedding it was, "Lord-a-mighty, give me time, Corry. Piping costs, so do them bathroom and kitchen things."

Hiding her rage and disappointment, Coralie first tried sweet talk. "Just a kitchen sink to start with, Hampie-hon?" she cooed, with her head on the Old Man's shoulder. And he laughed at her!

"Your own folks never saw a sink. And it weren't much different when you was married to young Jack Sims."

She'd been took and knew it now, but Hamp spoke the Lord's truth. Not even a well in the yard at home. They'd hauled water from a good piece down the road and the rain barrel mostly leaked. Then she married Jack and hauled from the same well, a good piece in the *other* direction. And Jack spending every cent on jalopies and old car parts until he killed himself in one of his contraptions. When Hamp Tolley came courting her he said the devil was a true father to all such cars. That sounded good to Coralie. What she didn't know yet: Hamp was an expert on the devil.

"Plonk" went a mason jar lid. She tilted her head instinctively, to sight along the row of newly capped jars on a shelf. The last vacuum lid had sealed itself good; that noise was mostly a sure sign. Apples had a good color with the 'scorbic acid stuff she'd put in. "Looks like tomato worm poison," she'd said, sincerely wishing that it was. By durn, she pure hated the Old Buzzard and his sneaky grandchild too, always squatting behind the stove while she worked. Emma Sue was gone now, like always, just at clean-up time.

Wasps and yellow jackets were after the peelings, right through the holes in the beat-up old screen. Glory be, another trip to the pig pen. Coralie had been there earlier with a mess of rotten apples; down cellar they were all going fast. The Old Man said he'd beat her if she didn't pick out the best and can them, so's he could still have fried apples with side meat for his early breakfast. *She* cooked it, every daggone day. Neither Jack nor her daddy had ever got up early when they didn't have to, that was for gol-durned sure. A lot of good old Hamp's

property had done her. So far, anyway...

Coralie stayed mad these days. All of sudden it seemed like she'd choke with it as she came down the back steps and looked up the hillside. Hamp Tolley's house stood in a hollow; right behind it on the hill was an old burying ground — and Hallie's huge marker. When Coralie asked for a sink, Hamp gave his first wife a new gravestone! Poor Hallie must of been worked to death but at first she only had a little bitty marker like the others. They leaned every which-a-way; no more buryings up there now. That fine stone *was* Coralie's kitchen sink and liable to wind up in the kitchen yet, the way the hill was washing out. Probably bring a few old bones with it.

Hallie had got Coralie's rightful money—now Emma Sue was s'posed to get part of her rightful inheritance. But oh no, she wouldn't. Carrying extra slops for the hateful pigs, Coralie figured they'd pushed her too far. One way or another, Hamp Tolley would pay for what he'd done and if the grandchild got hurt—tough!

'Twasn't like she was any old hag. Coralie was scarcely thirty-five and every curve was still in place with a waistline in between to prove it. Her eyes were wide and blue and didn't take but a rinse to keep her a real blonde. The fellows still watched when she swished past the crossroads gas station. Coralie figured that old rooster was getting something pretty special—but it turned out Hamp was marrying her young muscles. Not her young curves. He couldn't live forever though, and she might have swallowed everything and waited. Then Hamp brought in Emma Sue to live and said he was leaving her fifty uncleared acres with a mess of pulpwood and a walnut grove.

Filthy hogs—Coralie threw the apple peels at them and started back to the house. There now. Look at her. Out of the woods behind the burying ground a spindly girl child ran full tilt at Hallie's gravestone. It stood to the rear of all the others and towered over them. Emma Sue zoomed downhill, then launched herself almost horizontally. There was a flurry of angular arms and legs, a swatch of unkempt hair waved wildly and Emma Sue Tolley, aged eight, was perched on top of her granny's headstone. Wampus, the mongrel hound, made wild circles a-

round it, racing straight across the grave at every pass. He barked happily up at his mistress, treed like a scrawny, pinch-faced coon.

Coralie wished the Old Man would come along. He'd thought a heap of that grave since he put up the new stone. (Never looked at it till then.) Emma Sue was an awful trial sometimes—get Hamp mad enough and he might send her off yet. That wouldn't change the will but Coralie could plan better with the brat out of her hair. It might be lies about the walnuts, anyway. The old buzzard wouldn't tell her where they grew. Said robbers would come with a truck and steal them. That was true. Big walnuts were worth plenty but Coralie had looked and never found a one.

Old Hamp had laughed and howled and slapped his thigh when she came home that time, scratched from the woods and burrs on her pants and the devil's darning needles clean through her torn shirt.

"What you done with Emma Sue's walnut trees?" he'd crowed. "Sneaked 'em out on your back? You're strong as a horse but even a horse ain't that strong."

Coralie didn't say much; the rough old devil scared her sometimes. But she never did a hand's turn she didn't have to, and behaved as uppity as she dared. Was about all the fun she had—

Emma Sue was down on the ground now. She jumped back and forth across the grave, mostly using its stone border. Hamp had put in new dirt and told Coralie to plant something before the hot weather. That *too*—then the kid began to kick his dirt around. The heavy dog had short legs (beagle blood); he wallowed. Munro Tolley, Hamp's eldest, had been Emma Sue's father. Killed off in the army in some outlandish place, like on the TV. Hamp only had electricity for TV anyhow. Wouldn't use a bathroom if you gave him one. When Munro was gone his wife lit out and no wonder. Loula, Hamp's married daughter, had kept the brat till the Old Man fetched her home.

Then Emma Sue and the dog started down the hillside. Halfway to the yard they met Hamp. Too bad he didn't catch them on the grave but Coralie would make sure he found out. Ugh, look at the old lard bucket. His belly strained at his overalls and she could see the red in his face even from here. It was

too round for wrinkles, and Hamp had the high blood pressure all right. Maybe even a heart attack but he'd never tell it.

Coralie's red, pouty mouth was all pursed up and hatred shot from the blue eyes. She'd seen what Hamp was up to. He'd put Emma Sue to picking dandelions; that meant wine making for Coralie. A job she'd ducked so far. Hamp didn't really like the stuff anyway—seemed like the old buzzard was riling her for a purpose. Suddenly she wondered: did he figure on running her off? Maybe find him a meeky-type woman? Let him try! Coralie was getting hers; that was settled already. But she'd best be careful and act nice-like for a while—

When Hamp finally came in with the child, his battered straw hat was full of dandelion heads. Coralie didn't complain. They found her on the back porch, serenely putting ivy plants in a basket. (She'd dug some rooted bits in a hurry from the front yard.)

"Sun's not too hot yet to set these out on the grave," she said primly. "Ain't respectacle to leave it tore up like Emma Sue done."

Hamp bellowed and hauled off to swat his grandchild; then he turned suspicious and decided to check for himself. He huffed up the hill yanking the whining youngster along, and telling what-all could happen to tombstones and folks who jumped on them. As for running on a grave with a *dog*—when he saw the damage he let her have it good. Every wham on the skinny backside raised Coralie's hopes. But Hamp must have read her expression. He let the howling culprit go and said, "Help Miss Corry plant her ivy. I'm a-going off and take me a look at your walnut trees."

Emma Sue stopped crying and rubbed her bottom. "What walnut trees? Whereat is they?"

"That's what your stepgrandmammy would like to know," Hamp chortled. Then he stumped off into the woods.

Coralie couldn't look at Emma Sue and still remember to be "careful." She took out her fury on the new dirt, stabbing viciously with a trowel. All around her the old tombstones leaned like drunks. Emma Sue squatted snuffling at her side. With each snuffle, her pentup rage rose; then the child gave an extra loud one. Coralie grabbed a sparrowy arm, hard, and hissed, "Your Gramma

will come out of this grave and *git* you!"

"Naw, she will not!" Emma Sue wailed. "Gramma kept me when I was a teeny little baby."

"Your Gramma is a Spook Woman now. Ever since she died, her finger nails been growing down there in the ground. For more years than you are remembering. Now they're so long they'd wrap around your head from behind and put your eyes out. She'll do it too!"

Emma Sue was transfixed. Slowly her fingers moved to the corners of her eyes and her mouth fell open. The sallow little face looked waxy. Wampus always responded to her moods; now he began to whine.

"Spooks that come up to earth eats mostly dogs," Coralie recited, fascinated by the effect of her own words. Emma Sue snatched Wampus and screamed but Coralie clapped a hand over her mouth.

"Don't let your grampa hear you. He ain't really romped on you yet. *My* grandmammy was a witchwoman! You better do like I say."

She sent the child home with a final word of warning: "Don't tell your grandpappy. The Spook Woman will put out your eyes for sure—and eat up your dog!"

When Coralie stood up beside the grave, her knees were shaking. But it was wonderful—a power feeling all through her and the mad feeling gone. She was practically a witchwoman herself—could drive the brat crazy or make her sick; even trick Hamp into doing her will. Serve him right for trying to run off his own wife. That's what he really wanted; she knew it now. But the brat would go instead. The walnut trees *were* there—they must be. Once Coralie got the will changed she'd have them. A wonderful plan began to take shape in her head. If Hamp was slow to send the brat away she'd use it and be rid of her for good. Afterwards, maybe the old buzzard himself...

She walked down the hill and the power feeling held her up. It was like floating. The Plan would take two or three days. That's how long she'd keep the brat whining and sniveling and giving Hamp fits. If Emma Sue was still around when The Plan was ready—too bad for her and nobody would ever suspect Coralie.

Emma Sue slept in the little attic room. Outside her window that night a voice

called her name. "Emma S-o-o!" it said. "Emma S-o-o!" She ducked under the covers and lay there shaking. Wasn't a bad dream. Emma Sue was wide awake—how could she sleep when Miss Corry said the Spook Woman was a-coming? She'd brought Wampus upstairs for protection—and wished she hadn't. The Spook Woman would come in for sure, to eat him! The voice called again, faintly through the blanket. Wampus must of sneaked off—anyway, the voice stopped. Emma Sue peeked out. Then her whole underfed body turned icy. The Spook Woman's hand was at the window, with a kind of ghosty light flickering around it! Curved nails a foot long. She musn't scream—but she might throw up, and she sure couldn't *look* any more. For the rest of the night, her head stayed covered. Feeling sick, she waited for the Spook Woman to crawl through the window and put her eyes out...

"Eat what's on your plate," Grampa told her the next morning. "You look like a sick cat."

"Have a hot biscuit, honey," said Miss Coralie, real sweet.

"How come biscuits for breakfast?" Old Hamp sounded suspicious but Emma Sue didn't hear their talk. She was trying to choke down a biscuit. Through the scared feeling and the sickness she remembered how good they'd tasted at Aunt Loula's. Folks there laughed and joked, and she'd played with her cousins...

"You *asked* for biscuits, Hampie," said Coralie.

"Plenty times but I never said I'd take a stick to you. Like I mostly have to do if I want some little old thing."

"Maybe I'm learning to 'preciate a good man."

"Woman, you're up to something but you ain't getting around me!" Hamp yelled. Coralie just smiled and shook her head at him. He stared back, looking baffled and suspicious.

Emma Sue couldn't hardly keep her eyes open that day but she wouldn't go near her attic room and the awful window. They ran her out for sleeping in the front parlor. Into the backyard, where she could see the burying ground. Right away, something *made* her get close to Gramma's grave, scared as she was. Why? Emma Sue sneaked up through the woods and found a hidden place to spy. Miss Corry's ivy plants were damp and new watered—did the Spook

Woman mess them up last night, busting through the ground? After a while it looked like the gravemound kinda heaved up, and Emma Sue ran. But she kept going back for the next couple of days, to spy and run. When Miss Corry came to tend her plants, Emma Sue slipped away quiet-like. Miss Corry was most as bad as the Spook Woman, when Grampa wasn't around. One time she looked at Emma Sue with her eyes all shiny-wild and said, "*I* know that Thing is still after you!"

Oh, Lordy, it sure was. That's why she'd crept downstairs after they were in bed, to spend last night in the parlor. Sounded like the Spook Woman came at her window again, round to the back. Once there were funny noises inside the house! But the Spook Woman didn't find her. Wampus was outside where he might could run away, did the Thing get after him. The next night she was back in the parlor again, when Wampus barked and scared her most to death. Then she knew he was all right — sounded like he'd treed something.

Grampa found her asleep in the morning, before she could get back upstairs. He womped her good and said he'd shoot her danged dog if he got woke up again with all that howling.

"Talk about skin and bones," he told her. "Even your *skin* is most gone. Maybe I'll send you back to Loula."

"Oh, I'd pure love that!" she cried out through her tears.

"No I won't send you neither. Your Uncle Dan's like everybody else; after my property. Lord, how your Gramma used to beg me to change my will, on account of Loula was her pet daughter. Dan Slade's wife, that's all she was to me—or is."

"You're ungrateful to your Grampa, Emma Sue," said Coralie.

That got Hamp's attention. "Ain't you sweet, Miss Sassypants? Up to something..." But Coralie just smiled, like she'd learned to do. 'Twouldn't be long now. She hoped the mean, foggy-wet weather would hold.

Later she got Emma to one side. "I've fixed a spell to keep the Spook Woman underground. You're coming to help me work it—on her grave tonight."

Emma Sue couldn't do such as that, but Miss Corry said she'd have to, and it would be the last of the Spook Woman.

"We'll have to pen up your dog. He'd spoil the spell."

Nobody could find Wamput. He'd been off most all day. At bedtime he was still missing. Miss Corry said she'd call up the stairs, real quiet, once Grampa was asleep. While Emma Sue waited she thought about running off the minute they got outside. Get lost in the fog...

But Miss Corry kept a tight grip on her arm, when they finally did go—out across the backyard, stumbling in the mist. They were most to the well when something tore past them and a terrible howling broke loose. Oh, Lordy, only Wampus, in the glow from Miss Corry's flashlight—he was barking up a gum tree and a little red squirrel skittered on into the branches.

Emma Sue heard Miss Corry say a bad word as she rushed at Wampus, with the light on him. Then she kicked the poor dog hard and they both yelped—Emma Sue and the hound.

"Shut up!" Miss Corry kinda hissed at her. "Had to stop him before Hamp wakes up." Wampus *was* quiet after the yelp, with Emma Sue's arms around him. But Grampa was awake anyhow. Soon he was saying bad words too, on the back porch.

"Just the dog again," said Coralie. "I came out to hush him up. Didn't want you waked."

"I bet. You was talking to somebody. Prob'ly a feller. Been so nice lately and now I know why. Hey you—take her and welcome."

Miss Corry was real upset, trying to tell Grampa wasn't nobody there and pushing Emma Sue down behind a yellow-bell bush. Wampus got loose and while the talk went on she could hear him moving in the wet weeds halfway up the hill. He'd wreck Miss Corry's spell yet and seemed like she had to go after him, or anyway back to the grave. Never had been, after dark, but now she walked softly off, straight to her secret path through the woods. Not even thinking. When she peeked out from her spy place she couldn't see anything—not Wampus, not the big stone. Then a watery moon broke out and she saw too much. Mists drifted over and it looked like all the stones was dancing. The new ivy on Gramma's grave twisted like snakes. It was the Spook Woman's doing. Miss Corry's witch spell wouldn't hardly work on such as her. By now Emma Sue couldn't move and she didn't care any more. She only waited.

Coralie had gone inside with Hamp; no help for it. At least he never saw the kid out there. Let him think she was with some "feller"—long as he didn't care enough to hunt for one. "Take her and welcome" —if that's how he felt, good. Finally Hamp fell asleep. Coralie was in control again — then she found the brat was gone. She looked inside and out, getting pretty wet, before she remembered the grave. Would the child dare go there alone to wait for her? Maybe; Coralie's power was strong. Cold on that hillside, and her in these damp clothes. She ran through the front door to grab a wrap of some kind, any kind. Then to the well —had left a thing she needed there, after the hound yelped. Found it! But he might yelp again. On the ground lay an old piece of well rope. Coralie snatched that up too and switched the flashlight off. Hamp musn't spot a light. The dog wouldn't wake him now though; not if she found the devil first. She had a rope and a pair of solid, strong arms. The power feeling surged up, mightier than ever. That mutt had meddled in The Plan—choking him would be a pleasure. She started up the hill.

Emma Sue kept watch and didn't know why. The ghosty moonlight put her in mind of the Hand at her window. She could most see it a-reaching through the mound, but the dark always came back first. Then she *heard* something—on the ground or under it? Oh up from the grave at last—the Spook Woman squatted there, close by her stone, with the grey ghost clothes a-hanging on her! The moon was gone again before she saw the fingernails. All of a sudden came a nasty scraping—like her sharpening them on the tombstone! And the next sound was a dog, panting and wuffing. Wampus. She didn't need any light to tell but it shone for a second anyway. The Thing had him by the neck; he was pulling back, then he yiped—

"Please, Spook Woman, don't eat my dog!" Emma Sue hadn't meant to say it but she did.

The figure on the grave was still. The dog struggled briefly against the rope around his neck—but strong hands pulled it tighter and he quieted, trembling. She'd had this power over them all and never knew it. The witch power in her own blood. 'Twas meant to be so—the child would die by The Plan but that was witchcraft from

the start. And a witch would do it, not "Miss Corry" telling tales. . .

"Emma S-o-o!" said the Spook Woman. "Come to me quiet now and I'll maybe not eat your dog. I can see in the dark, you're not coming. *Listen to me!*" The high voice rose just as the moon came out again and showed Emma Sue close at hand, free of her hiding place.

"Good. I see you now." Wampus made a choking sound, probably smelling Emma Sue—but the rope tightened again.

In her head Emma Sue was saying over and over, "Bark, Wampus!" Maybe Grampa would hear and come and he might not shoot him. Maybe he'd just whomp her instead. Grampa whomping her—a memory stirred in Emma Sue's numb brain. . .

"You're not coming fast enough. I'm taking me a bite of this dog!" Wampus gave another muffled yelp. The moon was clean gone and a dark minute started. Could even a Spook Woman see in this? Emma Sue didn't know but she was moving—

The desperate dog strained in her direction. He reached the grave's edge but his captor held the rope fast. Her voice keened on—then light scurrying footsteps sounded through it and were lost in a grinding crash which shook the ground. The keening soared into a wild scream but it was short and very final, dying with the crash of the falling tombstone as the dog leaped free. Under the stone in the returning moonlight lay the dead woman who had dug it loose—to crush a child. Emma Sue *would* play where markers sometimes fell—

"Don't whomp me again, Grampa!" the child was crying. "I *had* to jump on the stone! That spook was fixing to eat Wampus and put my eyes out if I'da come to her. So I snuck up the hill and done it. Was afeared I'd miss in the dark but it falled down like you said! Caught her good and I jest prayed Wampus would get loose and he did."

A lock of brassy hair showed in the beam of Hamp's flashlight, on the rock coping. Corry's head musta hit it hard, he thought. That's how come she went so quick. Easy enough to figure out her game, from the kid's talk. His big round-nose shovel lying there; Hamp had wondered why she needed it for them little plants. Working loose the stone, all these days. Musta propped it some way, under the dirt—

"Grampa, she's wrapped up in *our* sofa cover!"

A sheriff's man found the long pole with a cardboard "hand" fixed to it, along with a candle in a glass jar.

Hamp felt pretty good once it was all over, and the sun up. Wanted to be free of that one anyway and was he evermore right! Acting so nice to cover her devilment. She'd of got him next. Hamp shivered then remembered he was hungry. Too bad a man did need a cook. He opened a jar of his favorite apples while he pictured Wife Number Three—a meek soul he could slap around.

"Can I go back to Aunt Loula's?" Emma Sue was right light-headed with her "Spook Woman" gone. Didn't even ask where Corry was!

Automatically Hamp said, "Naw. You ain't going nowhere."

Emma Sue drooped, then her eyes widened as she saw what Grampa was eating. That jar by his plate—

"Miss Corry put bug poison in them apples! I heard her say it!"

Later the neighbors said poor Hallie had surely reached from the grave to punish that loose gal Hamp Tolley married. And him too. Course the child had it wrong about poison in the apple jars. 'Twas the shock killed him and no wonder, with that high blood. But it turned out Hallie really had fixed everything. Her favorite daughter Loula inherited what there was, in spite of Hamp's plans, and took back little Emma Sue. Never had been any will at all.

Some had heard tell of a walnut grove on the place but Loula said no—that was just her Pappy's big talk.

NEXT MONTH—

Leslie Charteris' THE SAINT in

THE POWER ARTIST

Adapted by FLEMING LEE

from the original NBC-TV Teleplay

by JOHN KRUSE

—in the October 1967 *THE SAINT MAGAZINE*

intent to kill

by Cornell Woolrich

It started to get dark, and as nature's generator went dead, the town turned on its auxiliary ones and went ahead working on its own juice. A sort of blazing neon moon came up all around that made the real one of six hours or so before seem as if it had been dim and dingy by contrast.

I kept right on standing there where I was while the change-over took place around me. I'd been standing there like that without moving for some little time now, as if I'd taken root on the spot. As if the impulse to keep on going had run down and needed winding up again. Or as though I'd forgotten what had brought me that far. But I hadn't.

I was right at the edge of the intersection, my toes almost overlapping the curb-lip. Across the way from me, one flange of a street-directional sign spelled out "Lexington Ave." Abbreviated like that, with no room to

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Have you ever dreamt that you wanted to kill somebody? Have you ever hugged the idea to yourself, laughing softly in your dream at the look in the eyes and at the sudden greying of the face before you—a face that, it seems only yesterday, had laughed with you, and perhaps even wept with you.... Have *you ever dreamt this dream? Read this story!*

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take in the whole designation. The second wing, at right-angles, was telescoped by perspective so that it narrowed-down and couldn't be read.

But I knew which street it was. It was the right one, it was the one I wanted. It had been the street she lived on; now it was going to be the street she died on.

A pedestrian cross-walk sign facing me bloomed a warning red, but only the WALK part of it came on, in palsied letters. The wiring loose. Then DONT showed up beside it after it was nearly time for the whole thing to go off again. But nobody had mistaken it for a go-ahead anyway. They went by the color and not the capitals. (Parenthetically the thought occurred to me: a color-blind person could've got knocked down right then, in those few seconds.)

Then it made the switch-back to green, and the whole process repeated itself. But I still didn't go over to the other side.

It wasn't because I was undecided; if I was undecided, I wouldn't have come this far. It wasn't because I was afraid; if I was afraid, I wouldn't have come at all. It wasn't because I wanted to back out; if I wanted to back out, all I had to do was turn around and go away.

It isn't as easy to kill someone as they tell you it is. It isn't as easy to kill someone as you think.

People were going by in droves, but none of them looked at me. They wouldn't have believed it if someone had said: See that man standing where you just went past? He's on his way right now to kill someone, someone who lives down on the next block.

Here's what they might have said, various ones of them: How can you report it *before* he's done it? You have to wait till he does it first, and *then* report it. You can't arrest him just for carrying a thought around in his head.

Or: *You* report it. I have to meet my wife and pick up my car. I'm late now.

Or: Not me. I have an appointment at the beauty-parlor. If I miss it by even ten minutes, they won't hold it for me, I might have to wait a whole week before I can get one again.

Or: I have my own troubles. I just got a ticket. Why should I cooperate with those guys? It's their baby, not mine.

If you looked straight up overhead, the buildings made a picket-fence around the sky

that only left a little well of it open in the middle. The rest was all converging lines of aluminum lashed-together with gleaming zircons. Like railroad-tracks tilted up into the sky, with tiers and tiers and tiers of twinkling ties spanning them, growing smaller, smaller, smaller as they climbed... Until your eyes got tired and dropped off, and you lost them near that end-of-the-line called heaven. That subway-station in the sky.

This was New York, beautiful but cold.

And not for little men and little women and their grudge-matches.

Billowing life all around, and imminent death standing there, still, in the middle of all of it. Elbowed a little bit over this way, edged a little bit over that, nudged a little bit back the first way again. A bus overshot its yellow-stencilled unloading-slot, came a little too far forward, and opened its steaming door right in front of my face. A woman in rubber jack-boots got down heavily sideways, and one of them landed right on the toes of my left foot. I pulled them out from under, and she glared at me for having my toes there right where her foot was going to come down.

I reached to feel for the gun, not to use it but to see if it had become dislodged, the way you touch your hat to straighten it after a slight collision.

It was all right, it hadn't been disturbed.

The bus paled into an azure silhouette for a moment behind a parting gush of exhaust-fumes and then went on its way. CINZANO stared back from its rear end, in a diagonal, in big block-capitals. Then they contracted into lower-case. Then they contracted into italics. Then into undecipherable molecules. Then the traffic coming behind blotted them out altogether. But the world had read their message.

The deep-freeze or whatever it was that had held me, thawed and dissolved, and I'd broken stance and was starting to go across at last. I almost wouldn't have noticed it myself, but the ground seemed to be slowly moving backward under me like some sort of conveyor-belt, or a flattened-out escalator-tread going the other way. And now that I'd started, I didn't stop any more after that. That had been the last time.

I moved slowly, but I kept moving. Going down the street, just going down the

street. Like I had no reason, had no purpose, had no thought in mind. I touched the gun once, it was still there.

It felt heavier than it had in the old days, but I'd been in the hospital meantime and had lost weight. It was Government Issue, I'd brought it back with me from Saigon. You're supposed to turn them in when you're separated, but I hadn't.

I looked up at an ascending angle and recognized the building where I'd used to live. I even saw the windows which had once been mine. I counted up to them, that's how I knew them, but I didn't use my finger, I didn't want anyone to notice me do that. I just counted with my eyes instead.

I didn't see the man on door-duty outside, when I turned and went in. Then when I entered, he was in there but he didn't see me. He had his back to me, he was on the house-phone and he was talking to someone in the building, and he seemed very engrossed. More than engrossed, he seemed very excited. Or they were, which amounted to the same. "Now take it easy," I heard him say. "Now pull yourself together and try to talk more slowly so I can understand you."

I went around the turn to the elevator-bank, off-side to the front entrance, and pushed for the car. It came gliding down silent as a pin-drop, all glossy chrome and all empty. I got in and pushed the six-button and it closed and started to take me up

It had been so easy to get in here unobserved, I almost couldn't believe it. I'd never been able to pass him like that in the old days when I'd still lived here. But maybe it wasn't the same guy, I hadn't seen his face, and they all looked alike in the uniform.

The minute I got out, somebody unseen called it away from me, and it went on further up somewhere else, so it didn't even leave a trace of which floor I was on.

And then I came to the door, the door that had been our door, but wasn't any more.

I remembered how many times I'd come to it before, cold from being outside, overheated from being outside, tired from being outside. Now I was bringing a gun to shoot and kill with, in from being outside.

Once we'd hung a Christmas-wreath on it.

I remembered the last

time, how it had slammed. And I'd thought of a line from a song I used to know: *"And as the door of love between us closes—"*

I got out the key I'd still kept, and opened it, and went in.

I saw the chairs I knew, the lamps I knew, the windows, the walls, the doors I knew. That same water-color in its same white-leather frame, of a Montmartre street-scene signed by someone named either Cobelle or Cubelle (I'd never been able to make sure) was still on the wall up there. A book on the table said: *"Tom Jones"* We'd had that one *then.* A record on the player said: *"Once Upon a Time, Never Comes Again."* We hadn't had that one *then.*

She must have just come in. Her coat was over a chair-seat dribbling downward to the floor. A glass with half a highball in it that she was coming back to in a minute was on a stand beside the chair. She'd never drunk before. Not by herself I mean. At parties, out with friends. Maybe she had something now to drink by herself about.

I knew she was in the bedroom, must be, although I couldn't hear her making any sound.

I called her name, not loudly, routinely as though we both still lived there in those rooms together, and she came in to me.

She wasn't frightened. She was surprised but she wasn't frightened. She must have been changing her clothes; to rest, to be more comfortable, maybe to get ready for a bath. When she came in she had on just a light-blue corduroy wrap-around over her foundation pieces.

I saw her pull it more closely closed across her when she looked at me. It couldn't have been modesty. We'd been married. It must have been apprehension. Must have been apprehension; she sensed.

"What'd you come back for?" she said. "You said you never were, you never would."

"For this," I said. I took out the gun. "I came back for this."

She stared at it with an odd look of fascination, as though she'd never seen one before. I knew that wasn't it, I knew that was a misreading. It was fear, but it looked like hypnotic fascination.

"Will that," she asked me vaguely, the pupils of her eyes a thousand miles away, on the gun, "undo anything

that's been done. Will that rub out the past."

"It'll rub out the future," I said, "and that's even better."

"There is no future," she said. "It doesn't need a gun to tell us both that."

"No, but it says it awful well." . .

"You're like all men," she said. "Like they always have been. Like they always will be. Kill, when you're hurt. Kill. Hurt someone else when you're hurt. Two hurts are better than one. Two hurts hurt more than one hurt."

She crossed her arms in front of her breast (with an odd suggestion of chastity, I don't know where I got it from) and lowered her head, waiting.

"Go ahead, kill," she said.

"Look at me then. Look up at me. I want to see your eyes."

She lifted her face. "Here are my eyes," she said.

"Traitor's eyes," I hissed, "that looked at someone else. Softened then closed, for someone else."

"Time never ended, you never came back. Then *he* came. You told me he would, you wrote me to look for him. He came from Saigon, and brought me love from you. He brought me messages. He brought me little snapshots, of a grubby face, unshaven beard, unkempt fatigues, that filled my heart with heaven and filled my eyes with tears. You'd eaten together side by side, drunk together side by side, fought together side by side and almost died together side by side. It was the closest I could get to you. It was as much of you as I could have or hope for. He was your proxy. The kiss was still your kiss, though it came from someone else. The hug was still your hug, though it came from someone else. The possession was still your possession, though it came from someone else. How can you explain these things? I was faithful to you, to only you and only you, through someone else's body.

"It wasn't not-enough love for you that betrayed me, it was too much love for you. That one night, the only night there ever was, ask him, ask him if you ever see him again, ask him whose name he heard me whisper in the night."

"Another man's son," I said bitterly. "Not mine, but another man's. Out of my wife's body, but another man's. Another! Another! Another man's!

"I wanted to dangle him on my knee when he was

five. I wanted to play baseball with him when he was fifteen. I wanted to stand beside him and drink with him when he was twenty-five and married his girl.

"Gone now, all that gone now. Another man's eyes, looking out at me from his little-boy's face. Another man's hand, holding mine when he trots along beside me. Another man's tears, when he falls and barks his knee. Another man's blood, peering through the scrape.

"And when I die, and find out all the answers that I missed along the way, another man's son will stand by the grave with his head bowed down. Another man's, not my own."

My voice cracked, forlornly.

"Thief. Give me back the son you gypped me out of. You robbed me of my little hunk of eternity. It's like dying twice and dying for good, when you die without leaving a son."

She kept looking at me, like I'd told her to. She kept letting me see her eyes, like I'd told her to. Her eyelids flickered, though; they kept wanting to blink, and her eyes to shrink away from me. She wasn't brave. Her skin was whiter than the paper you write on. But, here are my eyes, she'd said. She kept letting me see them. She kept holding them as steady as she could. So she *was* brave, after all.

"I walked up the aisle with you," I remembered in a revery. "Away from the altar and away from the priest in his lace surplice. Your wedding-veil folded back clear of your face. The marriage-kiss from me still freshly-pledged on your cheek, orange-blossoms, lilies-of-the-valley spraying in your arms."

A sob that I hadn't known was there blurted in my throat.

"No, I can't kill you, I can't shoot to kill you. No matter what you've done to me, you were the girl in my marriage-bed."

I looked down at the out-pointed gun as my mind told my fingers to lower it, but my heart already had, and it was down.

"When we first opened our eyes and looked at each other. The self-consciousness, the concern. That first searchingly shy look. (Did I do everything right? Was I the man for her?)."

She supplemented: "(Was he disappointed in me? I wasn't too scared, I wasn't too dainty?)"

"I wanted you to go to the bathroom first, you wanted

me to go first. In the end we compromised. Neither of us went. Neither of us spoke, because neither of us knew what way to put it in.

"I went down to a public pay-place in the lobby, when I 'stepped out a minute to get cigarettes.' Where you went, I don't know—

"Then the coffee came we'd asked them to send up. Remember that first coffee together, looking at each other over the tops of our cups. Couldn't even take our eyes off long enough to swallow. Everything was so new, so first, so just-starting. Everything was ahead, nothing behind. Even the sun didn't cast us any shadows in back when we walked.

"Children, making believe they're grown-ups. Grown-ups, acting like the children they are and always will be. Children of God. Poor us."

I swung from the shoulder and flung the gun with all the force that I had in me, against the wall over to the side and back of me. It struck with such violence the impact alone should have been enough to detonate it. I don't know why it didn't. The guard must have still been on. It fell down there in the corner, black and bulky and boding ill, its ugly intention inhibited.

She walked slowly and spent toward a small table there was against the wall, and first leaned over it pressing her hands down on it as though she weighed more than she could hold up. Then sank down upon a chair beside it and let her head roll on the table and clutched her arms around it.

She didn't make much sound. Only the shaking told what it was. But how she shook. As if every hope and every happiness were coming loose.

I looked at her. What was there to say? What do you say, what can you say?

"Cry," I said with sad accord. "Cry for you, for me, for the two of us."

"Cry," she agreed in a smothered voice, "for the whole world, and everyone that's in it."

"Cry—and goodbye." I turned slowly and went to the door. There wasn't hate in my heart any more, there wasn't wanting to get even, there wasn't will to kill.

"Goodbye," she echoed faintly after me. And she said my name, and put that with it. My private name, my given name, my first name. Never mind what it was. It was still her right to use it, only she and no one else.

I opened the door with a

strange sort of care, as when you don't want to disturb someone, and let myself out. Then I closed it and looked at it from there.

Once I'd said, this is the door that love has come away from. Once I'd said, just a little while ago, this is the door I'm bringing death in to. Now death had been there and had come away again without striking. A door that doesn't hold love, and doesn't hold death either. Oh what an aching empty barren place lies behind there.

The elevator was somewhere else, so I went down the safety-stairs. It was quicker than waiting for it to come. Down and around, then down and around again, five times, from the sixth floor down, at a jogging trot that sounded a little bit like a tap-dancer's time-step, because the steps had steel rims that clicked under me. Then gave the springed end-door at the bottom a sweep aside that opened up the lobby. And as it did so, there was a sudden flare-up of excitement. It had been there all the while but the soundproof door had kept it muffled.

Outside the building-entrance were two, not one but two, police patrol-cars, sometimes called Micky Mouses in the vernacular, their red roof-reflectors swinging away and spattering all the walls opposite with blood—or red paint or mercurochrome, as your fancy sees and calls it. A cop was posted just inside the street-door, obviously to keep anyone from leaving the building. He'd already kept two people, a man and a woman; I could tell that by the way they were standing awkwardly to one side. Whether they were together or not I couldn't make out. There was a second cop acting as a sort of liaison between the lobby and the cars outside, going back and forth all the time. In the lobby were several more non-uniformed men who were very much of the police, it stood out all over them. The doorman, on the house-phone, was saying to someone: "Keep your door locked, please. Don't open it." Then he was saying it to someone else. Then to still a third.

They pounced as soon as I appeared, one of them on each side of me like magic. I never knew people could move so fast. I couldn't use my arms any more, before I'd even felt anything.

"Where'd you just come from? Identify yourself."

"From 6-B. I was up there to see someone."

"How'd you happen to use the stairs?"

"Thought I'd save time. I didn't know there was an ordinance against it."

I started skittishly. One of them had had his hands going up and down me without my being aware of it until it was over.

They interrupted the doorman's relay of warning-calls to ask: "He live in the house?"

"No, I never saw him before."

He hadn't, and I hadn't either.

"What's it about? I asked, not indignant—because you don't get indignant when they mean business like they did, not if you're sensible—as much as uncomprehending. And let's say, resolutely clear both of eye and inner knowledge and determined to show it. "What's up?"

They didn't answer. The attitude: you don't ask us questions. We do it.

When I turned to the doorman in an unvoiced repetition, he didn't either. Apparently unsure he had their approval and not wanting to risk disfavor.

But the man over by the door whom I have said it was my impression was being kept in on a stand-by basis, being a civilian answered as one civilian sometimes will to another, police or no police. And notably when they're being inconvenienced.

"There's been an armed hold-up, and the man's still at large somewhere upstairs, he never got out. They're combing the building for him floor by floor."

They gave him a curt look of aside (spelling: never mind talking so much) but nothing was said I noticed to contradict him. So the story stood up.

They took me back up to where I'd just come from, using the car this time.

They rang the bell, and waited, and there wasn't any answer, no one came.

"6-B'd, you say?" they asked, beetling their brows at me in menacing distrust.

"6-B's what I said," I said.

They rang again.

My God, I thought, suddenly cold and constricted at the throat, I left my gun in there. I never took it out with me again. I remember now.

One of them had his hand up pummeling now—the hand that wasn't holding my arm in a twist. And nobody answered.

"Police Department," they kept saying, taking turns at it. And still nobody answered.

Finally they sent a call down for the building-superintendant; he came up in response and he opened it up with his master-pass-key.

She'd gone back again to where I'd last seen her (I say back again for she must have got up from there in the meantime, in-between, and then gone back again; she'd have had to, there was no other way about it, no other explanation). She was lying just as before, only not shaking, not crying now. Through with crying. Her head down on the little table against the wall, one arm curved around it. The other though was hanging straight down now toward the floor, inert. Like a pendulum that has stopped.

And the gun, as if a feat of magic levitation had been performed, or as if it had been jerked by a wire suspended from a pulley, had leaped clear across the room, in a straight diagonal from the corner into which I'd thrown it over to the side she was on, and lay under her dangling hand. Not right under, out a few inches.

All that was said was: "No wonder you took the stairs coming down."

There might be her fingerprints on the gun now where mine had been before, but they wouldn't matter much. (Fingerprints can be manipulated by somebody else after the fingers' owner is already dead; they knew that, and I did too.) Erasing them of all importance was the fact it was my gun, and I had been in there with it.

What strange turns life takes, I thought, gazing down hypnotized into the gloomy pool of my own future. I came here to kill her, I changed my mind, and now they-'ve nailed me for it anyway. As though it were the intention that counted, and not the act. The thought leading up to the deed, and not the deed itself.

And maybe it does. Who can say? Maybe it does.

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ALL BRAND NEW ADVENTURES OF *THE SAINT*

the flying saucer of taylor county

by Al Moffett

Beejay Potts squeaked back into the swivel chair at the Sheriff's office radio console and crossed his hands comfortably over the paunch that had grown during the several years he had worked nights in the same spot. Occasionally, he would reach out and pull the microphone to him and communicate with one of the three cars the county has patrolling the stretches of Florida piney woods at night. Or stir from the chair to fix a fresh cup of coffee.

The steam rose from the cup on the desk in front of him. Beejay had just answered his last call for awhile, he hoped, so he had nothing more pressing than to watch his coffee cool, and reflect on the past few days and the commotion that temporarily upset his town.

It started at about this time Wednesday night, when the town's night-time taxi driver called the Sheriff's office to report he had just

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Flying Saucers (ie., Unidentified Flying Objects) have been seen repeatedly in our skies for the past twenty years. Thousands—no, tens of thousands—have seen these objects in the sky and have either been frightened and chased by them or, so we are told, in some instances—invited on board.... Texas newsman Al Moffett tells the story here of one such "happening"...

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seen a flying saucer! Beejay wrote down the information the cab driver volunteered: It was about the size of a quarter held at arms length, and hovered east of town for about five minutes before racing out of sight. The cab driver said it was too bright to see the edges of it sharply defined. Beejay had read enough about flying saucers to know that most of the reports are, in reality, lightning bugs, weather balloons, or upset livers. He would have selected one of the three arbitrarily, to close the "case", had not the town's senior doctor called with virtually the same report. The doctor had been on a house call (a pretty good indication it's still a mighty small town) and saw the thing.

A housewife who couldn't sleep and was looking out her bedroom window was next to call.

Beejay knew all these folks didn't have the same liver problem, and it was too cold for lightning bugs, and the light didn't act like a weather balloon caught in the wind. Beejay ended each of the phone reports with a reassuring "I'll get right on it!", but he hadn't the slightest notion what to do. This he was mulling over when the young deputy in car four radioed in and asked whether Beejay had received any odd phone calls. Suspiciously, Beejay asked why.

"You won't believe this," the patrolman responded, "but I think I just saw a flying saucer!"

"I believe it," Beejay growled without turning on the mike, and reached for the phone directory to look up the number of the nearby Air Force base,

That was two days ago. Since then, that little orb of light had gotten Taylor County more newspaper space and television air time than the past ten years of swamp-buggy mud races. The next night, half the townsfolk were sitting on roofs or cartops, hoping to catch a glimpse of the famous visitor.

Beejay knew a few diehards still would be watching tonight, but most had gone back to their usual ways of spending the dark hours, and the flying saucer was being forgotten.

His coffee had cooled, so Beejay pulled the cup to his lips, without moving out of his slouch. A few drops fell on his shirt front, as was usual, and the little bit of warmth actually felt good against his chest. He relaxed deeper in the swivel chair,

content to let another Friday night pass by peacefully and unnoticed.

But such was not to be!

Dooley Mullins is a mechanic-of-sorts in town, who has worked at one gas station, then another. He's the kind who never gets around to washing your windshield, because by the time he finishes telling of his latest deal, your tank is full. Dooley is certainly not the type to gallop into the sheriff's office, or anywhere, gasping for breath, and sweat streaming down his face. But here he was, doing just that!

"I seed it!" Dooley hollered, running for the dispatcher's desk and thrusting his grease-smeared face nearly into Beejay's. "It lit in the woods where I was and burned me!"

"Hold on a minute, Dooley. What lit in what woods and burned you?"

"That flyin' saser what ever'body's been tellin' about. Oh, my God, it was awful! Beejay, it tried to burn me up, I swear it!"

Dooley's hands were shaking as he clutched at his shirt pocket for a cigarette, but the pocket was empty. Beejay took his own pack from the desk and pushed one at Dooley. The mechanic gratefully took it, but was shaking too hard to light it. Beejay struck a match and held it out for the quivering cigarette; his eyes, though, were on Dooley's arm that was trying to still the cigarette. The hair on the back of his arm, from his hand to his rolled-up shirt sleeve was singed to the skin. He glanced at the other arm and it, too, was singed.

Beejay advised Dooley to sit on the worn leather and watched the mechanic closely while pouring for him a cup of black coffee. The pause and hot liquid seemed to calm Dooley down a bit. It also gave the deputy time to notice Dooley's eyebrows were singed, too, and the bill of his cap seemed to be blackened slightly around the edge. Beejay gave his shirt and pants a once-over, too, but concluded they were too greasy to show whether they had been burned or not. "They should be!", he thought, wrinkling his nose at the smell.

"Tell me exactly what happened, Dooley, and we'll see what we can do about it," Beejay said as he sat back down at the radio desk and pulled a yellow pad in front of him.

Mullins sucked in a deep breath, and his eyes widened slightly as if remembering

some horror. He said he had worked until about eleven on a transmission job that a customer had wanted the next morning. When he finished, he locked the station and began walking home for bed. He customarily shortcuts across the half-mile wide patch of woods between the service station and his rooming house, which he did this night.

Partway through the woods, Dooley said he noticed a large bright light off to his right. He said it looked like a fire, except it was too white. Thinking somebody might be in trouble and had lit a fusee, he started off towards the light.

"There's this little clearing," he related, his words coming a little faster. "Soon's I got there, I knew that wasn't no fusee. I wisht I'da run, but I didn't. I just stood there, and the first thing I knew, this ball of fire swooped up into the air over the trees, then it swooped down almost on top of me! Lord, it was big as a football field!"

Beejay interrupted him. "How bright was the thing, Dooley?"

" 'Bout like lookin' straight on into a headlight real close up, only bigger. I had to hold my arms over my eyes it was so bright. Then I started to feelin' something prickly all over. The air got real stuffy and hot, like when you're in the middle of a forest fire. Man, I run fast as I could!"

Beejay turned his face away from the mechanic to think over all he'd heard. He felt an impulse to go to the clearing and see if "the thing" was still there, or had left any marks. He drummed his fingers on the desk and pursed his lips as he fought back the impulse for a few seconds. Then, he reached for the mike.

"Car Four. Come in and take over the radio for a few minutes!"

Dooley was quite reluctant to return to the woods, but Beejay's will was stronger, and Car Four with two new occupants was soon pointed towards the flying saucer's landing field.

High weeds slapped cold dew on Beejay's pantlegs as he led the way through the woods. For the deputy, the damp night air and moonless dark revived memories of all-night searches in woods like these, for missing kids and armed robbers and, even further back, 'possums and froglegs. Beejay's six-cell flashlight cut a bright circle for

the men to follow until they reached the spot where Dooley said he turned off the path to the right. Sure enough, there was a trail still evident by bent wet weeds. They picked their way through the pines and wet bushes to a small clearing and Mullins confirmed this was the fateful spot.

There hung in the air a faint aroma of burnt green wood, like the smoke of a campfire freshly drowned. The flashlight hopped from tree to tree around the clearing, and each tree seemed to be charred slightly from shoulder-height up a few feet. Beejay shone the light on the ground, and burn marks showed there, too, in streaks. At the near edge of the clearing, the flashlight caught something that shined back. Beejay rushed to the article, but it turned out to be a half-empty pack of cigarettes, freshly covered with dew. Apparently, they had fallen from Dooley's pocket when he started his mad dash to safety.

A funny chill raced up Beejay's spine and made the hair behind his ears feel like it was standing straight out. He felt the skin on his arms draw tight with goose-pimples. Beejay knew it wasn't the night air. He wished he were chasing an armed robber, or something he could understand.

"We've got enough evidence here," he directed at Dooley. "Let's go back into town." Beejay knew he had said it too fast and searched Dooley's face for a reaction, but Dooley seemed even more anxious to leave.

The two men rode back to the sheriff's office without speaking. When they went in, the young deputy minding the radio asked what had happened.

"You won't believe this," Beejay mocked, his composure now restored by the lighted office, "But Mullins saw a flying saucer."

"I'd believe it!" the deputy said, nodding emphatically, not realizing he was mocking in return.

Mullins had hung back from the two lawmen and was, for the moment, forgotten, until he asked if he could use the office telephone. He dialed zero and told the operator he would like to make a collect call to . . .and gave the number. He held his hand over the phone and confided to the deputies: "It's the paper over in St. Pete. Bet they could use a story like this!"

The young deputy didn't notice, but Beejay thought it

was strange a small-town mechanic like Dooley would know a big-city newspaper's telephone number by heart. He didn't say anything.

The story rated a four-column headline on the front page in the morning paper. The early shift of the wire services picked up the story, and the floodgates opened.

Beejay hadn't seen the paper nor did he know his participation in the sighting was being mentioned so prominently until the telephone woke him up. He told the reporter calling what had happened, expressed some surprise that the newspaper should "get the thing so blown up", then dropped back off to sleep. The phone rang again. Beejay toned down the story for another reporter on another paper, and hung up again. This time, though, he took the receiver back off the hook, laid it down on his night table, tossed his legs out of bed, and headed for a shower.

It had been some time since Beejay had been in to the sheriff's office in the daytime, but he knew the scene that greeted him this morning wasn't typical, especially for a Saturday. Cars, some splashily-painted with radio and TV call letters, ringed the office and strangers were going in and out the front door. He squeezed past a little knot of men crowding the lobby and heard the sheriff's gravelly voice from the adjoining office. He could tell from the flat tone of voice the sheriff was reading something. It sounded familiar. Then, Beejay realized the sheriff was reading aloud the report he had written last night about Dooley's flying saucer.

Beejay at first couldn't place the man standing with the sheriff in a bright circle of light made by several tripod-mounted floodlights. Just outside the circle were two large movie cameras, recording the sheriff's words. A number of reporters surrounded them. Then he recognized the sheriff's companion. It was Dooley! A clean suit on and even a tie! The grime had been washed off his face, and that seemed to make his singed eyebrows a little more prominent.

"Or maybe," Beejay thought as he concealed himself behind several reporters, "Maybe he gave them another singing this morning."

The sheriff finished talking and Dooley took over. He retraced the two night visits to the clearing, and he said Beejay Potts, the deputy in

charge at night, had confirmed the fact that a flying saucer had visited that spot. This caught Beejay by surprise, but he remembered the chill and, well, fear, and admitted to himself he could have mumbled something to Dooley at that moment.

Two Air Force officers were standing quietly at the back edge of the crowd. Beejay noticed them slip out the door, so he followed them to the street and introduced himself. The officers confided they were going to make a quick inspection of the site before it was trampled, and Beejay volunteered to lead them to it.

The clearing was considerably less spooky in the warm sun. Beejay stood back as the officers measured the clearing, took chips from the singed trees and blades of burned grass, and scribbled notes in little pads. The Air Force officers weren't at all sure how to investigate a flying saucer landing, and this was obvious to Beejay. The officers knew Beejay knew, but nothing was said.

The sun began to get hotter and brighter as Beejay stood in the clearing, and he regretted leaving his sunglasses behind. He squinted against the sun as he watched, but finally gave up and turned to seek out a shady tree. As he walked into the sun. Beejay shielded his eyes with his arm. Suddenly he stopped, forgot the hot sun, pulled himself to full height and in an almost commanding voice said, "Gentlemen, I think it's time we go back to town and nip this thing in the bud before it goes any further!" With that, he gave a defiant little toss of his head, but immediately wished he hadn't since it turned out more girlish than defiant.

Not much had changed at the sheriff's office. Dooley had gotten his second wind, and was embroidering the story more than ever, as the cameramen continued to grind out more film. Beejay again slipped into the office unnoticed, the Air Force Blue close behind. The deputy edged around the circle until he was at Dooley's side, just outside the glare of light. Beejay reached out and grasped one of the tripods and held it tight. The mechanic was telling, again, of "the thing" that suddenly swooped up into the air.

"It hovered there for awhile," Dooley was saying, "and I could see little portholes around the side. No, I couldn't make out exactly what the men inside looked

like, but I could hear their voices!"

Dooley paused for effect after dropping that little jewel into the story. Then he continued:

"Like I say, it hovered there for awhile, then...it came swooping down right on top of me!"

"Like this, Dooley?" Beejay nearly shouted, and when Dooley turned to answer, the deputy pushed the tripod so the floodlight rushed down straight toward the mechanic's face. Instinctively, Dooley threw up his arm to protect his eyes, and Beejay breathed a sigh of relief. He hated to think what the sheriff would have done to him had his gamble not paid off. But it did, for the singed side of Dooley's arm was up by his face, and the part exposed showed no signs at all of burns.

Dooley realized what was happening and quickly tried to twist his arm around to expose the singed part, but couldn't. Dooley suddenly realized that all his careful planning, and the pain from singing his arms was all wasted because of one little mistake.

"Do you want to tell them, or should I?" asked Beejay.

SIN DOES PAY !

The following item is reproduced exactly as it appeared in the London *Daily Mail* on May 3 of this year:

It pays

to stay single

I EARN £5,000 a year and the woman I live with has unearned income of £1,500. Would we be better off married?
M.R.S.,London

BOTH of you gain considerably by staying single. If you married, the unearned income would be lumped with yours and, therefore, liable to surtax. As it is, she is taxed as a single person, which means a substantial saving in your combined tax.

Single, you should pay £1,516 income tax and she £484, a total of £2,000. Married, you would pay income tax of £2,085, plus surtax of £179.

to avoid conviction

by Avram Davidson

Ray Shulley walked down the street with his teeth clamped on a cold pipe. He was haunted by a face. Maybe he'd find it somewhere along here. Neighborhood movie, insurance broker, Italian bakery and hotpie, jeweler, millinery, upstairs dancehall, kosher delicatessen, picture framing, fresh fish and lobster pond. Lots of faces. He didn't even have a clear picture of the one doing the haunting. . . Let him just see it, though—he'd know.

He shifted the pipe. Gave you something to bite on. He never lit it. A pipe was a good prop. Nobody ever thought wrong of a guy with a pipe. Maybe if someday he wrote a book he'd pose for one of those back cover pictures with a pipe. Wholesome. Manly. Baloney. He'd seen the face along here somewheres. It couldn't have been too long ago. Not been here too long. Maybe move before too long. Unless something broke. Something had better.

Avram Davidson, writer and anthologist, brought us the story of a very young man's day in the sun in the May 1967 issue of this magazine. And now, as he has done before in these pages, he introduces us to a man of principle—who loves good clean air, and hates the ungodly. . . .

In his pocket was a quarter, a dime, two nickels, and a penny. Lobster pond. Nice broiled lobster wouldn't eat at all badly. Couldn't do it, of course. Not now. Not yet. Haberdashery, chain bakery outlet, ice cream parlor, household linens, candy store, fire station, photographer.

The photograph must have been taken, say, two years ago. He must have changed since then. Bar room. Ray Shulley went into the bar, nodded casually to the bartender, walked straight on back to the men's room, took in a fleeting but thorough glance at the faces in the mirror. No, not in here. He'd remember, now he was here, if it had been in here. Out in the street again. Health Foods. Podiatrist. Beauty Parlor. Pool, Billiards. Ray Shulley went down the stairs. Smoke, chalk, resin, clatter. Not in here. Not now or any other time.

Then upstairs again and there it was. House of Wong. Coming out. *Out.* Of course. Ray had never eaten in the House of Wong. Soon, maybe, though. Get this out of the way, relax. Expensive place—look at menu in window. Eggs foo yong. Sub gum. Peking duck. Two years. Put on a lot of weight in two years. Probably two good years. Grown mustache. Eyeglasses. Good clothes, easy manner, too. Not feeling at ease when picture taken. Manner too easy now, maybe. Gotten soft. Ray Shulley could sense these things.

He'd sensed something right away when he came here. He didn't force anything, didn't pump anybody. But he learned—well, enough. Bits and pieces. Fit them together. With enough time, they fit themselves together. Of course, Ray didn't have all the time in the world. Something had to break. It might break real soon. Five feet seven. Well, everybody and his brother was five seven. Weight, a hundred and sixty. More than that by now. Hundred and eighty, easily. Complexion, fair. Big help. Identifying marks: scar on right knee. Of course. *Big* help.

"Excuse me, sir. May I see your right knee?"

Right away.

Nice conservative overcoat. On the bus. Behind him: black leather jacket (no eagle), old lady, two nuns, ponytailed school girl. And Ray Shulley. All the way in the back. Nothing like a point of view. A point of view of a nice conservative overcoat.

What name? Everett Wilson, W.E. Wilson, Wilson Everett. Not written on him, no. Fled state to avoid conviction. Fled state. To avoid—

Never know what you might find, if you look.

City of a hundred thousand people not exactly small. Not so big, though, that there aren't plenty of people who'll call the railroad station the depot. Bus driver, for instance. "Depot next." Nice conservative hat. Adjust it, getting ready. Ray Shulley got up.

"Rear door getting out, please."

Ray already at rear, first one out. Who's tailing who? Five cents for newspaper, into depot close enough behind . . . Wilson Everett, say. Round trip to Senlac. City big enough to have suburbs. Big fleas have little fleas that. . .

"Senlac. One way."

You never knew.

DEMS FLAY STATE DEPT.
BLONDE STRIPTEUSE CLAIMS FRAME-UP.
VET FOUND DEAD

Senlac. In some ways a little sharper than the city, some ways a little softer. Price tags a little higher. Noelie's Sporting Goods. Anyone for tennis? Wilson Everett, say? Reflection of garbage truck on plate glass window doesn't hide all of him, hefting tennis racket. Clerk beaming. Kid. Must be clerk. One eye on garbage going into grinder, other on windshield of car. Blue-grey blur with pink one on top, dissolves into nice conservative overcoat with nice conservative face under ditto hat. Pass on by. Bundle in arm. Back towards depot. Depot? Senlacers probably sensitive, say: station.

Noelie's Sporting Goods, here comes Ray Shulley. Kid clerk front and center.

"Yes sir, can I help you?"

"Well, uh. You got those uh T shirts with the uh nylon necks?"

"Yes SIR. How many. Only one? You save money by buying three, they're three for—"

Here we go. "Well, uh, one'll be enough. Uh, I'm a little low on cash. I can endorse a check or a money order, whichever you prefer best. Huh?"

Watch carefully, now. First: Annoyance. Tiny sale. Second: Disdain, only wants to cash the check or money order. Third: Nervousness. Uncertainty.

Ray Shulley could smell it. It was in the air, had been for—

"Well, sir, could you wait

boss comes back from lunch?" Old Noelie: at the Rotary lunch, clapping the banker on the back and calling him "Sherm". Best time, yes. "I just cashed a check for another gentleman who was just here, and Mr. Noelie doesn't like me to cash very many without his okay."

Best time, yes. Lunch, supper: fifty-fifty chance that the boss is out. Time past when the boss lived over the store, ate in the back with one eye on his kid minding the front. Ray Shulley mumbled something about going to come back, walked out. Back towards the station, the depot, *gare, bahnhof. Europe* —be nice to see it again as a civilian. Maybe not so far off. Maybe.

Toyshop on other side of street. Exit Wilson Everett with bundles. The bundle from Noelie's helped. Man with bundle automatically respectable. The more bundles, the more respectable. Merchants nervous a bit, but— respectable man, conservatively dressed, with bundles? Okay.

One way to city. Lose a penny by not having round trip. Ah, well.

STATE HEAD FLAYS DEMS.
COPS DECRY STRIPPER'S SQUAWK.
PROBE VET'S DEATH.

Lincoln Plaza, best hotel in city. Third rate by ordinary standards. Ray didn't bother to go in after Mr. Wilson Everett. He went into the bar around the corner, his regular bar, to think about a few things. A small beer, Tim.

"Irish on the rocks." Strange voice. On the rocks. Why can't people just say, on ice? Ray looked up. Well, well, well. Irish on the rocks for Mr. W.E. Wonder if he was ever blackmailed? Oh oh. Looking right at Ray Shulley. It just clicked.

Ray Shulley didn't make the mistake of taking his eyes drop away quickly. He just let them go dull. Conservative overcoat slid over next to him. Affable. But checking-up.

"Say. Didn't I see you in Senlac this afternoon? Seen you around a lot, it seems to me."

Shulley shrugged. "I'm around a lot. Yeah. . .I seen you there this afternoon. I went there to see if I could raise a couple bucks outa my broth'inlaw. He wouldn't gimme the time a day." Bitterly, he sipped the small beer. "T'Hell with'm."

Mr. W.E. relaxed. Smiled. "Well, have this one on me." Signalled to Tim. Money on

bar. "See you around." Exit. Yeah. . .but maybe not much longer.

Ray Shulley finished his beer. Well, time to wind things up. Phone booth at the entrance to the park. Dial Operator and ask for the Police.

"Headquarters, Sergeant Riley."

"Riley? This is *cough cough*. "About that check-kiter you got the flyer on—"

"Who? *Who*"

Must have gotten a flyer on him. Poster in post office. Face haunting Ray Shulley. Why not Sergeant Riley?

"Wilson Everett or Everett Wilson. Wanted in Ohio. Two convictions. He's at the Lincoln Plaza—"

"Yeah, but who's *this*—"

Some might answer "Santy Claus" before hanging up, but Ray Shulley just said, "His picture's in the post office, Sarge." Cops had no sense of humor.

"Yeah," said Tim. "Once upon a time we had a morning paper as well as an afternoon one." He cut the head off Ray's short beer. "But then this Marcy chain they bought the afternoon paper and the afternoon paper bought the morning one and killed it. So now we got to wait till tomorra afternoon to find out what happened after twelve noon today. Hi, Nick." He moved away from Shulley.

Nick greeted Tim in the kind of voice which sings whiskey tenor. Ray took a glance in the mirror. Cop in civvies. Can always spot them. Rye and soda.

Nick took a swallow, then said, "You cashed any funny checks lately, Tim?" Tim said, "Naa." Moved up to hear more. "Yr lucky. Plenny a local businessmen been victimized past couple weeks."

As who knew better than Ray Shulley. It was in the air. "But we were watching," Nick said, absently letting Nick pour some more rye in the glass. Priming the pump. "We had our eye on this guy alla time. He was at the Lincoln Plaza. Living real high. Willie Eberhardt or sumpthin like that. Well. So this evening we lower the boom," he preened, watching himself in the mirror. "I wanta tell you. Guy hadda gahdamm *printing* press in his suitcase. Checkbooks? Dozens of 'm. Rubber stamps —Why, he could make up a let's say cashier's check on the Chase Manhattan from A.T.&T. just as easy as you can make up a rye and soda." He paused, but the

glass was not refreshed. Tim had his money's worth. "Yeah," Nick finished the drink. "We give him enough rope to hang himself. Now he'll soon be wishing he'd stayed in Ohio. He run off from a charge there, too."

Exit, cop. Tim caught Ray Shulley's eye, winked. "He's hot stuff, that Nick. 'Give him enough rope, ha. Somebody turned this queer-check guy in for the reward, that's what happened. I—"

"Anybody that'd turn a man in for the reward is a dirty dog," Ray Shulley said.

"Well, don't look at me," said Tim. "I din' do it. Another beer?"

"Irish on ice." He caught Tim's look of surprise. "Time for a change," he said. Tim laughed.

Back in his dusty little room, Ray Shulley shaved with care. Then he skillfully cut his hair with a comb-and-razor device. He opened his closet, pulled out a drawer, looked. One very good suit—not the one he had on. One very good overcoat, shirt, tie—ditto. Soon be more. Now that Wilson Everett was safe away. See tomorrow's paper. Let the word get around. Let the honest, trusting merchants relax. The air had smelled with nervousness since he'd arrived. Now the air would clear.

Good clean air. An atmosphere a man could work in.

Ray Shulley pulled out his suitcase, opened it with a key. Took out rubber stamps, stamp pads, pens, ink, and packs and packs and *packs* of nice, blank money orders.

As soon as the air had cleared, he'd start to work. The first thing, he'd stop off at the bakery and buy a loaf of bread—for cash. Nothing more respectable than a guy with a loaf of bread wrapped up and stuck under his arm.

Check forgers: lousy crooks.

THRILL TO *THE SAINT*

IN BRAND NEW STORIES

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the gothic room

by Borden Deal

If I hadn't had a friend in town, I wouldn't even have had the room. I arrived in Sarasota in the height of the tourist season and if you don't have a reservation then you might as well be dead and sleep in the graveyard. Luckily an old friend, whom I hadn't seen since the Chicago days, lived there. My sister had written that Tom Courts had moved to Sarasota and this information dredged up out of my mind after I'd been turned away from half a dozen motels without even a gesture of apology.

My next stop was a phone booth, where I looked up the name. Sure enough, there he was. I played a dime on the chance and he came on. He was cautious enough even when I told him immediately that I was an old friend, just arrived in town, and I thought wryly, *Yeah, I'll bet he doesn't want a house guest.* He became even more cautious and noncommittal

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There have of course been handsome men, throughout history, whose looks have either brought them fortune—or an early death. It is tempting to say that the men who died lacked brains; perhaps they just couldn't buck the Establishment of the day. In our times, however, handsome men who also have brains, and are amoral, often go very far. For a while. . . .

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when he found out that I was me. Of course, I'm used to that reaction by now; when a man kills his wife he sure finds out fast who his friends are.

You see, I don't make any bones about it. Of course I don't brag about it, either. Ruth was my wife and then Ruth was dead and the evidence against me looked pretty good. I'll admit that much, but no more. Except that I had enough money to hire the best lawyer for that sort of thing in the country, and I was good-looking enough for my picture to be on the front page of every newspaper in the country for a month, and there were two lovely women on that jury. The verdict was ten to two for guilty but when it's a capital case ten to two doesn't count. I gave each of those two women my best smile as I left the courtroom and that was reward enough for the rest of their lives. With their looks, they'd never earn another one as well with a lifetime of doing the right thing for the right man.

Tom Courts was plenty cool—all my old friends were, these days, for I had not only got away with it, but I had taken away the big prize, too, half-a-million of Ruth's inherited money. I let Tom know fast that I was not interested in playing House Guest, all I wanted was whatever clout he might be able to swing in this town to get me a motel room.

"You could push on to Miami," he said hopefully. "Bound to be plenty of hotels over there."

"I like the west coast," I said. "Couldn't you help me out for old times sake, Tom?" I was sweating under the Florida sun in the outside phone booth, and cursing in my mind, thinking it was just my luck to get Tom on the line and not his wife. Helen would have been glad to do whatever she could for me. There's something about having a reputation like mine that's attractive to women—though God knows I had plenty of opportunity before I was ever tried and acquitted for the talent of murder.

"I'll see what I can do," Tom said at last. "Where can I reach you?"

I gave him the number of the pay phone. Then I went out and put the yellow roadster up on the grease rack at the service station where it was parked so I'd have an excuse to hang around until Tom came through. The Mercedes-Benz needed it, too; I'd driven all the way from San

Francisco since the last time it'd had a grease and lube job. Not that I cared; I could always turn it in on a lot for a big trade-in on a new job. It's the motor that goes in my cars, not the looks, and so I always get the big trade-in.

It was half-an-hour before Tom called back. I heard the phone ringing and hastened from the station to answer it.

"It took a while," he said in a flat voice. "Everything is pretty full. I've got a friend out on the key runs a nice place, though. I had to twist his arm, but he finally remembered one room he had empty. He says it's not much —but it's got a bath and a bed."

"Thanks a lot, Tom," I said. "I sure appreciate it."

"Just one thing," he said in a wary voice. "I didn't tell him anything about you. I'd rather he didn't know—after all, I told him you're a friend of mine. You'll. . ."

"Sure thing, buddy-boy," I said. "It's not the sort of thing a man goes around bragging about, anyway. How about coming out for a drink along about sundown?"

"Let me give you the address and the name of the owner," he said hastily. "Got a pencil and a piece of paper?"

"Sure," I said. "Fire away."

He gave me the name and address and told me how to get there. I didn't need to note it down; I've got a memory like that.

"Glad you called me," he said at last. "Hope you enjoy your stay in town."

"About that drink," I said.

"I'm afraid we can't make that," Tom said in a reserved voice that told me in no unmistakable terms that I couldn't extend an invitation he'd find possible to accept. "Wish we could, but. . ."

I grinned into the telephone. "Sorry," I said. "Maybe tomorrow I'll call and say hello to Helen."

"You do that," he said, and I couldn't help but laugh. And, being a mean-natured guy, I let him hear the end of the laugh just as I hung up. I guess Tom will never forget that Helen and I had a little whirl once. I was married to Ruth at the time, but Tom and Helen hadn't yet started.

What the hell, I thought, Helen wasn't worth it anyway. Not a very exciting woman to start with and she'd got pretty sticky toward the end, a couple of weeks later, when it came

time to cut it off. Damn a woman that doesn't know, or won't admit it, when the score is all on the board and the game is over.

I immediately liked the place that Tom Courts had found for me. A long curving shell road took you in for a quarter of a mile from the highway. It was all one building, made out of cypress boards that had weathered to a uniform golden tone of gray. A canopy led over a walk to the front entrance and there was a long wing of motel rooms off to the left. You entered a patio roofed over by mosquito wire and full of lush green growth. The patio was flagged and there was a big cage where a red-and-green parrot lived. A class joint, with atmosphere, and I just knew that the food was going to be good, too.

To the left of the entrance was a glassed-in room, where a lady with glassed-in eyes presided. She was pretty old, but I smiled at her anyway because I might need a favor before I left. She fluttered the eyelashes she didn't have at me and I gave my name and said Tom Courts had called to make my reservation.

"Just a moment," she said, and pressed a buzzer that rang away off in the distance somewhere, I'm sure, summoning somebody or other.

Sure enough here he came. I was waiting as patiently as I could, trying to avoid the eye of the woman on the desk. I didn't want to have to flirt with her just because she hoped I would.

He came across the patio toward me, one hand outstretched. "I'm Hal Everett," he said. "Tom Courts told me you'd be on your way out."

"Sure thing," I said. "Appreciate you putting me up on short notice like this. I know you've got a hell of a season going for you."

He was a guy of average height, average size, average looks. He wore prescription glasses tinted against the sun and when he'd had enough hair to tell he had been redhead. The red hair had left a legacy of freckles, too, giving his face a spuriously boyish air, as freckles always do, no matter how old a guy may be. I could tell immediately that he didn't like me, that he'd just as soon, having seen me, have turned Tom Courts down. It didn't worry me. Most men don't like me, anyway. I've always got along without 'em.

He laughed nervously. "I just hope you won't be offended," he said and be-

cause he was nervous I knew he'd checked the Mercedes roadster out front. It might have the dust of three thousand miles on it but he could read its lines, all right. "It's not much of a room. It's all we could manage."

"I don't mind roughing it," I said generously. "As long as I've got a bed and a place to shave, I'm happy."

"It's right up here," he said, gesturing toward a rickety wooden stairway that led upward at one side of the patio. "We don't normally use this part any more, but. . ."

"Lead on, MacDuff," I said. "I'm dirty and tired and thirsty, in that order. Is there anyone who can get my bags out of the car?" I looked at him. "The Mercedes," I said. "The yellow one."

"Let me show you the room first," he said. He tried to laugh, without a great deal of success. "You might turn it down on sight."

He led the way up the stairs to the platform above. That room was unbelievable, all right. First you went in a door that you had to thump in the right place with the flat of your hand to get open. There was a twisting tiny passageway, the roof so low you had to stoop. Then you came out into the room.

The walls were paneled in pecky cypress—I mean pecky, too. There was a window that might fairly be called picture that looked out over the gulf. A lovely view. But God, what a room. There was an Audubon print of a Great Blue Heron on one wall for decoration.

"Where does a guy sleep around here?" I said, looking about. I didn't see a bed, only a couple of chairs and a cheap TV set in one corner.

He gestured upward. "There," he said.

Believe it or not, I had a split-level room. There was a balcony at the back, that you reached by a flight of four stairs. On the balcony was a bed. And behind the balcony was the bathroom. He showed me that, too, as though anxious I couldn't find it for myself. A beautifully arranged bathroom; I noted at once there was a window directly over the sink that afforded one a view of the bed, immediately below, because, as the bed-balcony was elevated above the room, so was the bath elevated slightly above the balcony. With the window where it was, you had to stand sidewise to shave looking into the mirror because it was mounted on another wall.

"Gee," I said with genuine

admiration. "What crazy architect figured this one out?"

"This is the old part," he said apologetically. "Built before we bought the place."

"It wouldn't do to bring a girl in here," I said. "You'd never make out, because she'd be laughing too hard."

"It's all I can manage," he said defensively. "I know it's. . ."

"Don't worry, I'll make out," I said. "I always do. I can dine out on this room for the next six months, Mr. Everett. You're really doing me a favor."

"I'll bring your bags," he said. "This time of day, there's no one else. . .is your trunk locked?"

I gave him the keys. "You might want to move the car, too," I said. "Out from in front of the canopy. I don't figure to go out tonight."

He came struggling up the steps and through the maze into the room with the first load of luggage, and then the second. I'm no believer in traveling light. I want all my well-earned goodies with me. He was puffing and blowing by the time he got through. I had an impulse to tip him but since he was the owner I knew that would be just too much. So I contented myself with a grateful nod, and he started away.

"Wait a minute," I said. "The key. You forget to give me the key."

He was apologetic again. "There is no key," he said. "The door won't lock any more."

I frowned. "I've got a lot of good clothes in these bags," I said. "Some sports coats I simply couldn't replace."

"I'm sure everything will be safe," he said. "We've never had a burglary or a robbery or anything. You won't have to worry about it, just off the patio and all."

I relaxed, since there was nothing else to do. Hang loose, that's what I always say. "I don't plan to be going out much, anyway," I said. "I just want a good, long rest. Peace and quiet to knit up the raveled sleaves of my soul."

"This is just the place for that," he said enthusiastically, and would have stayed to discuss it if I hadn't indicated pretty definitely that I had other things to do.

After he was gone I took a shower and then, standing slantwise to the sink so I could see my face in that crazy mirror, I shaved. While I was doing so, I kept looking through that idiot window over the sink down onto the bed and making up ap-

propriate conversations for man-and-woman to have back and forth in those two positions. Real intimate, I mean. Who ever saw a bathroom with an *inside* window in it anyway?

After I had shaved, with my usual care, powdered on the lotion and rubbed it in good, I stood back to take a good look at myself in the mirror. Why the hell shouldn't I? My face has been my fortune, hasn't it? That, and the brain behind it.

That's the trouble with most handsome men. They don't develop anything else because the looks are enough. The same is true for most beautiful women, too, though there are more smart beautiful women than smart handsome men. But I had both.

I studied my face critically. After all, I was pushing forty and maybe one of these days the looks I'd counted on would begin to go. Not yet, though. The gray at the temples only added something, instead of taking away. My skin was still tight and youthful, and I'd taken care to keep the body lean and good, too.

I'd always known that I was handsome, just as I knew that I had gray eyes and wore a size nine shoe. It was a part of my condition of living. I am of Scandinavian stock but I have a leanness of cheek and brow that most Scandinavian men don't have. My hair is a very dark blonde, with just a ruff to it to make it manageable. Add to that a good mouth and a manly chin and the experience of being a handsome man for twenty-five years—I'd started with my first woman when I was fifteen—and it added up to a formidable combination. It had parlayed me a long way, with just one drastic little trap that had nearly got me because in the end Ruth had been more attached to her money than to me. That had surprised me, and so with scarcely thinking about it I had killed her. It was stupid and foolish and it had nearly got me. Except for those two women on the jury.

I lay down on the bed for an afternoon nap. I'm a great believer in the siesta if you intend to keep young. After I had slept for two hours I got up, did isometric exercises, took another shower, and began dressing for dinner.

I was here for a rest. But you always have to be careful. Just as sure as you don't shave, and wear your oldest pair of pants and a shirt with two buttons missing, you'll

run into the greatest woman of your life.

I put on a pair of powder-blue slacks, a coatshirt of slightly darker blue, and carelessly knotted an ascot about my throat. I hesitated a long time over the sports coat, then took the one I had bought in Nassau made of watered silk. I called it the stained-glass window coat, because that was the effect it had. I put on a pair of black deerskin shoes and I was ready to go.

I came out on the platform above the patio and paused to reconnoiter. The sun was down—I had missed the sunset through my economy-sized picture window because I had been asleep, with the curtains drawn—and the patio, the back part where tables were, was already filled with diners. I pulled the door shut behind me, remembered there was no key, and went down the stairs feeling rather foolish, as though I were an actor going on stage. Everybody seemed to be watching me coming down those stairs. I didn't mind, even if it was rather silly.

I went on into the bar and chose a small table in the corner. I don't like to sit at the bar; there are too many collisions there, of one kind or the other. I like to choose my own collisions, thank you.

The bar waitress came over to take my order and right then was when it started. She started flapping at me, as though she were the first woman in my life and had a great big favor to confer. Oh God, I thought. Now I've got to smile at her, and keep smiling, just to get nice drinks and maybe one that doesn't go on the check once in a while.

All of a sudden I felt a great weariness in my life. It hits me sometimes, but not often. If a guy could just turn it off once in a while, move inconspicuously like all the other slobs in the world that have to pant and sweat and beg after a woman, and work for them, and live with them for a lifetime just to have the illusion of being loved and wanted. But that's the trouble with a talent—it can't be turned on and off like tap water and you have to keep it honed for the big moments.

I smiled at the bar waitress and watched her practically do a flip of joy at being recognized. She was a little girl, with very black hair piled high on top of her head. She had teeth that were slightly buck, but not enough to detract, a starved-looking face, and very nar-

row hips that, if she ever started out to have children, would give her a great deal of trouble, I was sure. She wore a white blouse, low-buttoned over those barely adequate breasts, and a dark very short skirt.

"Hello, dear," I said. "Think you could rustle me a sourmash bourbon and water?" I named my favorite brand, the black label of course.

"Of course," she breathed, and I knew I'd get a real jolt of sour-mash in that drink if she had to sneak in the second shot herself. "You're staying here, aren't you?"

"How did you know?"

"Hal. . .Mr. Everett. . .mentioned you," she said. She cut a coy glance at me. "I knew you right away."

"How did you know?" I said, lowering my voice so that instinctively she'd draw closer.

She drew closer. I could have put out my tongue and touched the bare flesh of her shoulder. "From your description," she said. "You staying long?"

"That depends," I said. I drew back, deliberately. "I think somebody over there is trying to get your attention."

It cut her deep. She hurried away. But she looked over her shoulder as she went. I sighed. Hell, I'd hoped to have a rest. And what could a bar waitress do for me?

Dinner was excellent; I had a table to myself in a corner and the waitress must have got the word because she gave me great service. The first little bar waitress —she volunteered her name on the second trip, which was Barb—kept charge of the drinks even after I'd moved out on the patio. Just to give her a thrill, after suitable consultation with her I ordered a small bottle of '64 Beaujolais, the St. Vincent. You'd have thought I was ordering a great vintage, the way she carried on about it. It's a good little table wine, of course.

So I should have known. I hadn't been in my room more than half-an-hour when she stood breathless in my doorway and spoke my name.

I was lying on the bed on the balcony, just the bedside light on, reading a paperback novel. I looked down toward her standing in the lower part of the split-level room.

"Not tonight, dear," I said. "I'm tired."

She rushed up the stairs to the bed in a scurry of sound, knelt beside me, murmuring sweet nothings. I put my

hand on her head, feeling really rather affectionate and generous about it all.

"Let's get to know each other," I suggested. "I'll be here a week or two, likely. Let me rest and..." I heaved a sigh. "Let me get the thinking done that I came here to do and then...we'll see."

She murmured and brushed the side of my face with kisses but soon, like an obedient child, she went. I thought to myself, *Well, hell, maybe,* to explain my weakness to myself in keeping her on the string of her own making, and went on reading.

I guess it was eleven by the time I began to get restless. I had slept good in the afternoon, I was in a strange town, and abruptly, the way I always do such things, I decided to take a tour of the town and see what the layout looked like.

I dressed again, as carefully as before, and went out. The yellow roadster had been moved into the parking area. I got in and drove away.

I guess it was one o'clock when I came back. I'd been to two or three of the better bars, had a drink or two, had talked to no one but a succession of bar waitresses. Damned if they weren't all nearly as eager as Barb had been. What's the matter with this town? I thought on the way home. Aren't there any *men* operating here? Or maybe, in a town like that, they're all already tied down.

The place was quiet and dark when I got back. There was a single light burning out front, and a single light in the patio. I climbed the stairs quietly, pushed open the unlocked door, fumbled my way down the corridor to my room. I had left on a light in there.

I undressed, put on pajamas, and went upstairs to brush my teeth. That was ridiculous, a split-level room, but upstairs it was. As I entered the bathroom, I noticed something I'd not seen before—on the back wall there was a long low hinged door and it was half-open.

I knelt before it, pushing at it, thinking, What now? My God, this place is one surprise after another.

I pushed the hinged door back enough to see that it covered a low little cubbyhole, dusty and empty. God knows what it was ever designed for. God knows what the room itself was ever designed for, for that matter. The architect must have been crazy, or drunk, or both.

I said it was empty. Except for one small thing. The

nude body of Barb lay there, her face twisted toward the light as though opening the hinged door had disturbed her peacefulness. Her hands were behind her back and when I reached out to touch her, to see if she was as dead as she looked, she rolled on her dusty flanks and I saw that they were tied together with flexible extension cord.

I squatted on my heels, gazing stupidly at her. Then I rolled her into the original position again. Her face looked peaceful, though there was a bruise high on her forehead and a trickle of blood had flowed from the corner of her mouth. Her body looked bruised too, mottled and scratched about the hips.

Little girl, I thought. *Where did you leave your clothes?* And then I went to pieces. I stood up, shaking all over, knowing it all. If they discovered that girl's body in my room, then found out who I was. . .

I panicked. I ran out of the bathroom, past the bed on the balcony, down into the room itself. I snatched up a suitcase, flung it on the bed, grabbed a handful of clothes.

A knock sounded on the door, distant through the corridor. I froze in place. Then, moving very quickly, I hung up the clothes, put the suitcase back on the floor. By the time I had done so, footsteps were coming through the corridor.

"Yes?" I said.

"I want to talk to you," Hal Everett said in a dry, even tone.

I looked at him warily. "It's one o'clock in the morning," I said. I looked at my watch. "One-thirty. What's to talk about this time of night?"

There was a white, strained look to his face, in spite of the evenness of his voice. "Barb Malcolm came to this room tonight," he said. "Hours ago. Nobody ever saw her leave. Where is she?"

"What's it to you?" I said. "I don't even know Barb Malcolm."

"The little blackhaired girl who waited on you in the bar," he said. "You know her, all right." He looked at me out of his eyes. "I know who you are, too. I thought that handsome face of yours rang a bell. So I checked out your name with a guy on the paper."

"All right," I said. "She came in here. I sent her away. She's a nice girl, but who needs nice girls?"

"She. . .I guess she couldn't help herself," he said. His

voice broke. "I saw her come to you. . .but. . ." He stiffened himself. "I never saw her come out. Not even after you left."

"You're crazy," I said.

I moved toward him, as though going out the door. I had a wild idea maybe I'd get past him, get to the car. To hell with the clothes. To hell with everything but getting out of there.

He didn't move. "I've already called the sheriff," he said. "I thought this room ought to be. . .searched."

"Listen, fellow," I said. And then I stopped. It was no use. Because then I saw the gleam in his eyes behind those prescription lenses and I knew the whole story.

He had me, all right. He loved that little blackhaired waitress and, as I had done once, he'd gone crazy when he'd seen her come to my room. He had followed her when she had left and then he had brought her body to stash it in that crazy place in the crazy bathroom upstairs in my crazy room. Then he had calmly waited until I had come home.

He had me. I looked down at myself in my pajamas. They were my best pair and I had been wearing them the night I had been arrested for killing Ruth. I hoped some crazy reporter wouldn't notice it and make something big out of it. I sat on the bed and soon the room was filled to bursting with very big men with very mean eyes and hard voices. When they found her I didn't move from the bed, and Hal Everett didn't move from the corner where he stood, his gloating eyes on me.

This is the end of the line; there's nothing else I can do except throw myself on the mercy of the court of last resort. But I'm not worried—because I've got the best lawyer money can buy and I've already given him his instructions. If there's not at least one woman on that jury, I'll wring his shyster heart between my two hands. Because who wants to be judged by a jury of his peers—and who can bear that judgement?

dog days

by Lewis H. Kilpatrick

Jode Tackett was named the meanest fellow in our part of the Kentucky hills. He looked mean, his left shoulder hunched, his small gray eyes squinting and his tobacco-gormed clips twisting when he talked. And his talk was mean too, those yellowed teeth of his hardly ever speaking a kindly word to anybody but young ones. That's what made me wonder: Little shirt-tailed boys and pigtailed girls took to Jode like bees to a baited gum.

He had a two-room shack on the edge of our county seat village. There he scraped a living from several acres of white clay land, with only a passel of skinny hound dogs for company. Some folks said he soured up when pretty Lucy Elroy went off with a road building man and never was heard of again. Others allowed, seeing him sitting on his rickety porch and chewing, the dogs lolling around him, that he was just

Lewis H. Kilpatrick returns with another story from Sheriff Clint Hawkins' Kentucky hills where, apart from the fact that old fears die hard—and that the speech of the people is perhaps different from that in our towns —men and women have the same fears, the same hopes, the same dreams...

waiting for somebody to stop by so he could insult them. But I had a different idea.

"Jode," I said, coming in off the road, for he hadn't any fence to his weedy yard, "you appear a man who needs a friend."

He didn't get up to bid me welcome and there wasn't a second chair on the porch. All he did was squirt a spit of tobacco juice over the far hound and work his mouth hateful.

"A smart feller always has a friend in himself," he let out drawly. "Dale Bratton, your woman shore wed with a ugly cuss. If I had a face like yourn, I'd grow me a beard."

"Myrtle didn't take me for my looks," I made myself grin, "but for my kindly nature. Your hounds are near-sighted, Jode, or you would be here all soul alone."

"From what folks say behind my back," he growled, spitting again, "I had a dog for a mammy. Leastwise, I can't recollect any human ma of my own. And these varment-chasers are better'n most people I know." He squinted up at me. "How come you're in town?"

"Pa and Ma moved here last year to take their ease. Yesterday I fetched Myrtle in to stay with them." I grinned natural then:

"She aims to make me a pappy soon, Jode. I didn't want her away off on our Clifty Creek farm when that happens. We came to be near Doc Hardin."

That was about the first time I ever saw Jode Tackett smile kindly. His gray eyes opened wide and he got off his chair.

"Sit down, Dale," he said, dusting the splint bottom with his greasy slouch hat. "Sit yourself down and be to home. I've hardly knowed you since you come back from the Army. Reckon you seen and learned a heap there. Are your pa and ma well? How's Myrtle enduring her blessing?"

Then and there he took a queer turn for him. He talked clever and he acted celver, even offering me a chew off his twist. But we hadn't gassed long when I heard shrill yelling and laughing down the road. The hounds lifted their floppy ears and wagged their tails, and that Jode busted out laughing, too.

"I plant my best piece of land in early sorghum just to hear that purty music," he said, and went ambling into the shack.

"Jodey, tell us about the time Dan'l Boone swung on

a wild grape vine to escape the Indians," begged little Will Adkins, who was leading that passel of young ones.

"No, Jodey; I want to hear again how you captured that panther over on Red River," yelled Fanny Fasset, grabbing her pigtails out of reach of two of the boys.

"Jodey, my pa says Jesse James was killed years before you were borned," scolded another. "But—but I like to hear how you shot him out there in the West."

Jode made them line up, the girls first, for the sticks of sorghum cane he was peeling with his knife. Then, kids and hound dogs mixing on the porch, he sat himself in the middle of them and commenced to norate wonderous tales. None of them paid me any mind—and, after a while, I waved a farewell and went back into town.

I stopped at a grocery store on the court house square and bought several bottles of icy soda pop to take home to Pa and Ma's cottage, where my brown-haired Myrtle was waiting her time. The weather was suffering hot, locusts were chattering in the trees and everybody seemed plumb wilted, for Dog Days had begun. I found Myrtle in the hammock swing in the yard, fanning herself with a turkey wing but cheerful as usual.

"Honey," she said after she'd drunk of the pop, "guess who I got a letter from today?"

"An angel," I teased, "telling whether I've sired a boy or a girl, so the old folks'll stop arguing which it's going to be."

Myrtle sort of giggled, then she got serious:

"That letter's from Lucy Elroy. You recollect we went to the Tar Ridge school together and she claimed I was her best friend. But she wouldn't heed me when I begged her not to go off with that road building man until they were wed legal. Now—now, after all these years, she's way in California. He got killed in an accident. They never married, Dale."

I took the emptied pop bottle from her, saying nothing for a minute. I was thinking of Jode Tackett.

"Is Lucy figuring on coming back home?" I asked.

"That's another trouble," Myrtle sighed. "She knows her folks here won't welcome her. She's working and saving what money she can—and she's yearning for these hills. Sees now what a mistake she made. Dale honey, what ought I to tell her?"

"Do you reckon she still cares any for Jode?"

"Her letter asked about him twice."

"Take your pen this hour, honey," I said, "and counsel her to write him. He isn't much and he hasn't got much. But, somehow, I know he still loves her. Lucy must own up the truth to him, the whole truth. I'll post your letter with an airmail stamp this very evening."

While I'd laid by my crops and pastured our cow with a neighbor, I rode my mare over to Clifty Creek every week to look around the farm and do odd jobs. I hadn't gotten far out of town on such a morning when I met big Sheriff Clint Hawkins. His mustache was droopy and there was a Winchester across his saddle bow.

"Has there been a killing?" I asked uneasy, stopping my mare alongside his horse.

"Yes, Dale," he said. "But not the sort you mean. I've been on Red River, a piece from your farm, leading the hunt for a pack of wild dogs."

I hadn't any cattle or sheep, and chickens can roost away from such danger.

"Some people hold those dogs are mad," Sheriff Hawkins went on, and then I saw a full gunny sack tied behind his saddle. "I've got the heads of them we shot for Doc Hardin to send to the State Health Board for testing. The women and young'uns along Red River are scared out of their wits, and the men are keeping watch with their rifle-guns. Dale, I'm glad you took Myrtle into town."

Sheriff Hawkins did his best, I knew, to keep people in the county seat from getting fearful. But it was Dog Day, mountain folks will hold to their old notions and, in the heat of summer, there's plenty of idle time but a heap of busy tongues.

It was two weeks before I got out to Jode Tackett's shack again. I found him with a pile of flat rocks he'd toted in from his field and several pieces of lumber. He was laying a new floor to the porch and putting up new posts.

"Are you going to start a lying school?" I mocked, for he welcomed me this time with a friendly grin. "Those young ones already don't know facts from fancy after hearing your wild tales."

He sat us both chairs among the lolling hound dogs, took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his face with a bandana. Come to notice, his face wasn't mean looking now.

"I've got to fix up my

house and build another room," he said, winking sassy instead of squinting hateful. "Lucy Elroy wrote me what your woman counseled her. Please to thank Myrtle for me. I wrote Lucy back quick. Dale"—his eyes were soft—"I was born too low and I've been too ornery since to hold a human sin against a gal I've always loved. "

I didn't say much, but set in to help him with his work. After a spell, I asked:

"Are you out of sorghum cane? I don't see any kids around this evening."

He stopped fitting a plank to the porch floor. "That's a queer thing," he said, peering over his shoulder to the road. "There ain't been narry young'un here for two-three-days. No, there's still plenty of uncut sorghum in the field. Maybe they just know I'm busy," and he went back to his work.

I was coming out of the drug store a few days later, with a box of pills Doc Hardin wanted Myrtle to take, when I saw Jode standing all alone under a sycamore tree in the court house yard. That's to say, he was alone except for several hound dogs. Few grown-up persons ever went out of their way to speak to him, but what struck me was that no little boys and girls were hanging around him.

"Dale, have you heard about the trouble down the street?" Myrtle asked as soon as I got into the house. Then, not waiting: "Talt Anderson's cur snapped at Fanny Fasset and her pa shot it dead. Talt swears he's going to court about it."

I reasoned then what had happened with Jode Tackett.

"He is law abiding," I said, after telling Myrtle what I'd noticed. "Jode has licenses for all his hounds—though none of them is worth the fee—and he allowed Doc Hardin gave them what's called anti-mad dog shots when each was a pup. Kids aren't in any danger from his hounds."

Just the same, not a single young one now ventured out to that shack on the edge of town and Jode was all alone with his hounds. The August sun got hotter and frightening talk was thick as the chattering locusts. Those folks who had any sort of a dog got shed of it somehow or kept it in their house or barn. I heard those poor beasts barking and howling all through the sultry nights.

Jode was away off back in his white clay field when I happened by again. He had his grubbing hoe and shovel,

and was up to his knees in a hole. I went out there to him, wondering.

"Are you drilling for oil or hunting gold?" I laughed, for I always sought to fun with him at the start.

"Neither," he said, swinging the grubbing hoe and scarcely looking at me. "I'm digging a grave—a big grave."

"Why, Jode, you're a long way from dead yet. You'll take on new life and be almighty happy when Lucy gets here."

"She aint coming," he said in that sour voice he generally used. "I sent her a town paper, just to post her on the late news, and she read about this mad dog scare. Leastwise," he grunted, "that's the reason she gave for keeping where she now is."

I didn't press him more and he didn't see fit to talk more. The hounds were scattered around in the shade, feasting on hunks of what looked like boughten meat. I reckoned he knew what he was doing, but I didn't know just then. Directly, with him so unsociable and pointedly not wanting me to stay, I went back through the yard. I saw in passing that the shack was all fixed nice and comfortable, but the new foundation rocks and lumber were still piled about unused.

I stopped in at the court house and went to Sheriff Hawkins' office.

"Clint," I said, leaning on his desk where he sat with his feet propped up, "how many of those dog heads you all sent off were found mad?"

"Narry a one," he grinned, pleased at the fact. "But they were wild and unlicensed, and I was right in shooting 'em. Such beasts peril the stock. Dale, near as Doc Hardin and I can learn, there hasn't been a mad dog in the county this year."

"Have you all norated that around?" I asked, getting mad myself at the foolishness of people.

"We shore have," he nodded. "Sensible folks believe it, but some just crave excitement wherever they can find it. Dale, you'd best sit down and tarry a spell."

But I was off at a hurrying walk. I knew now the scare would soon die down and the young ones would start flocking out to Jode's shack again. No matter if Lucy Elroy wasn't coming back to the home and honorable wedlock he offered her, he'd still have little boys and girls, along with his hound dogs, to pleasure him.

I was stirring up consid-

erable dust on leaving the court house square and taking the road to his farm when I heard a far away rifle shot. Then I heard another. I halted, my heated blood chilling. There was a third shot—and I started running, fast as I could.

"Jode—Jode Tackett!" I yelled between pants for breath. "Jode—quit that shooting! Everything's going to be all right. Jode—don't squeeze that trigger again!"

He was standing by the big hole he'd dug, a Winchester repeater at his shoulder. But there wasn't a dog in sight. Hearing me, he turned slow and dropped the rifle-gun to the crook of his arm. I raced through the yard and down to the back field, stopping beside him.

"Reckon my eyes aint so good any more," he muttered, rubbing them with his free knuckles. Tear-water trickled down his cheeks and dripped off his chin. "Dale, my hands are getting shaky too. Them dogs went running and scattering soon as I fired the first shot."

I told him what I'd learned from Sheriff Hawkins. Jode appeared dazed for a minute, then he sighed deep and happy.

"It come powerful hard to make the choice," he said in a whispery voice. "I love my hounds, every dog and bitch of 'em. But—but I love young'uns too. Dale, I figgered that when there weren't no chance of danger here, they'd come 'round again. I got plenty of sorghum cane left and I've studied up a whole heap of new yarns."

Smiling, I took off my hat, spit on my hands and reached down for the shovel.

"Jode, take that rifle-gun to the house," I said, "and then whistle in your dogs. They'll trust you when you're your own kindly self. I'm going to shovel this pile of white clay dirt back where it's always belonged."

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vendetta

by James Michael Ullman

When it began, I was just a typical American boy, scheming my way through the jungle of adolescence. The possibility that what happened then would lead me to an incredibly strange destiny in my adult years never entered my mind.

Even so, I sensed the ominous in Joe from the start. He and his son appeared at our beach the first day of summer vacation, parking a truck under a tree and wheeling out a hot-dog stand, which Joe proceeded to man.

Joe Smith, he called himself, an obvious deception, since he spoke with a Dracula-like accent and hid his face behind a handlebar moustache. He was short, unwashed and surly, and his hot dogs, moreover, were uniformly cold and lacking in flavor.

He sold many, though, after his only competitor, an amiable old Italian, moved to a less desirable location a mile away. Nobody could un-

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Talk of a German, or an Italian, or a Gypsy, and your idea of these comes to life in your mind, at the same time as you bridle at the suggestion that any one type, or public figure, can conceivably be representative of all of us... James Ullman, author of THE VENUS TRAP, THE NEON HAYSTACK, etc., probes into this contradiction.

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derstand that. The Italian's product was better and cost less, but he offered no explanation for moving, and in fact seemed reluctant to discuss the matter.

Little Mario, Joe's son, roamed the beach, athletic field and park hawking bags of peanuts, which he carried in a sack. He was always too busy to play, but often he'd sit down and rest smoking a cigarette while gazing sullenly out at Lake Michigan.

At that, adults did a double-take. Mario was small for a 12-year-old anyhow, and occasionally a well-meaning woman would walk over and remonstrate with him, telling him his smoking would stunt his growth.

Mario's response would be to give her an outrageously obscene suggestion, sending her fleeing in horror.

Quite a character, Mario, and although the boys I hung out with were a year or two his senior, we admired his disdain of adult conventions. We were impressed, too, when in one of his few talkative moments, he confided that his father was really a gypsy, the last survivor of a tiny, nationless tribe wiped out during World War II; and that he, Mario, would beget many children when he became a man, thus reestablishing the tribe, of which he would be king, in the United States.

It was an odd thing for a smelly, ragged little boy to say.

But there was an even odder thing, we learned about Mario.

He stole.

Buddy discovered that. Buddy was our Leader. Bigger and tougher than anyone else in our crowd, he captained our athletic teams, organized our furtive excursions to peep shows on South State Street, and dictated our social standards.

In addition, he worked in his uncle's drug store, giving candy, sodas and cigarettes to boys he liked.

Actually, I despised Buddy. He was a boor and a bully, but my family had just moved to Chicago from Indiana. I cultivated Buddy's friendship because as a newcomer in the neighborhood, there was a lot he could do for me.

Buddy, Al and I went swimming one morning. When we returned to our blanket we found that our cash, all-told a sum slightly under two dollars, was missing.

"It's that Mario," Buddy said angrily. "While we were out deep, he was sittin' with

his hand near our clothes. And when he saw I was watchin', he took it away. . ."

"What'll we do?" Al asked. Al, a dumb, unimaginative slob, was always asking Buddy what to do, which was why he was Buddy's best friend. "Tell the cop?"

"Naw, we couldn't prove nothin'." Thoughtfully, Buddy banged fist into palm. "We'll teach him a lesson ourselves."

"I think," I said diplomatically, "it might be better to tell the cop."

"Whatsamatter, you chicken?"

When Buddy asked that question in that tone, no reply was possible.

That evening we reassembled on a bench near the hot-dog truck. Earlier, it had rained. Then the temperature dropped and a chilling wind swept down from the north, driving bathers from the beach. Mario's father, having no customers, idly watched us while we watched Mario, a distant figure trudging up a hill in the park toward a couple under a tree.

"We'll wait," Buddy decided, "until he heads toward the hole. He's gotta do that to get back here."

The hole, ringed by mounds of black dirt, was a construction site for a park fieldhouse.

"What'll we do then?" Al asked.

"Grab him there. Get our dough back, beat heck out of him and dump him in. It'll be fulla mud now, and he's too small to climb out."

"That's pretty rough," I said. "We lost less than two bucks, and we're not even positive Mario stole it."

"Gypsies," Buddy replied wisely, "are taught to steal by their parents. My old man told me that."

"Yeah," Al said. "They're dirty thieves."

"Even so, it isn't fair, beating up on a kid that size." I liked the situation less and less, especially since Joe, at the hot-dog stand, seemed to be eyeing me in particular. "Look, I'll go along, but I won't lay a hand on that kid. Whatever you do, you and Al do, and I'll only let you go so far."

Buddy's eyes were oddly glazed. "Suit yourself. But I'll tell you one thing. That kid's gonna learn nobody steals from me and gets away with it."

It occurred to me then that Buddy didn't care about his money at all. He wanted to torment Mario, and the money was his excuse.

There was still time to leave.

But if I deserted Buddy now, my social standing in the sophomore class convening in September would be zero; and I had a hunch that whatever Buddy planned, it would go easier for Mario with me there.

"Hey," Al said, getting to his feet, "here he comes. . ."

Yes, there he came, wandering down the hill toward the hole, and we walked that way too. We were closer, we'd be there first.

Just once, I glanced over my shoulder.

Joe was still watching.

Then we ducked behind the dirt piles.

Mario didn't have a chance. Pouncing from ambush, Buddy and Al threw him down and Al sat astride him. Mario kicked and screamed curses while Buddy went through his pockets, emptying them of currency and change.

"There's our dough," Buddy said happily. "With interest. . ."

He reached for the sack containing the bags of peanuts.

"Holy smokes," he went on. "Look here! He's our thief, all right. . ."

Under the bags he'd uncovered a bonanza—a jumble of sun glasses, packs of cigarettes, shoes, towels, a few wrist watches and a woman's purse. No wonder Mario sat down to rest so often. His main business wasn't selling peanuts, it was stealing anything he could lay hands on.

Grimly, Buddy rose. With a grand gesture, he emptied the sack's contents into the hole, a drop of about five feet, and then tossed the sack in too.

He turned.

"Let him up," he ordered Al. "And Don, stay outa my way. I'm entitled to this. . ."

Al got off.

Mario rolled into a crouch. Snakelike, his right hand dipped in and out of his shirt front. We heard a click, and a blade glittered.

Little Mario was armed with a switchblade knife, which added a new dimension to the situation. We weren't angels, but boys in our neighborhood just didn't carry those things, much less use them.

"Don't touch me," Mario warned. "Leave me alone, or I'll cut you. . ."

I decided to make a final appeal to reason.

"Let's beat it," I advised Buddy. "We've done enough. He'll never come back to the beach after this."

"Nobody," Buddy said,

"pulls a knife on me and gets away with it. . ."

He took a step toward a two-by-four.

I tried to stop him, but Mario lunged at him, and then Al tackled Mario.

Momentarily, all three were a mass of arms and legs.

Mario rose, and almost simultaneously, Buddy and Al kicked, sending him tumbling backward into the hole.

When he landed, his head hit a sharp rock.

He lay very still.

I jumped down into the mud and kneeled, but there was nothing I could do. In Indiana I'd lived near a railroad crossing where, periodically, cars and trucks loaded with migrant farm workers were hit by trains. My father had told me how to ascertain if the victims were still alive.

Slowly, I got to my feet. At the rim, Buddy and Al stared at Mario's limp form.

Buddy asked, "He'll be okay, won't he?"

"No. He's dead. And I guess we better tell someone."

"Jeez, we'll be in a jam. . ."

"It was self-defense," Al said, his voice cracking.

"Yeah," I replied, "but it won't look so hot. Three-to-one, and we're all so much bigger than he was." I paused. "Two-to-one, actually, since you guys did it. I tried to stop you, remember?"

For the first time since I'd known him, Buddy was at a loss for words.

Clearly, a leadership vacuum was developing.

Well, we couldn't get in much more trouble than we were in already.

"Look," I said, "if nobody saw what happened. . . ."

Al was still bewildered, but Buddy caught on fast.

"Sure. They'll think he slipped and fell, climbin' around. Kids his age are always climbin' around the hole, the parents got up a petition for a watchman. . ."

"You're willing to risk it? To go home and pretend we don't know anything about it?"

"Hell, yes."

"Okay." I wrapped a handkerchief around my hand, picked up the knife, closed the blade and dropped it into Mario's shirt. "Now give me his money, so I can put that back too. And then help me out of here. . ."

A man in an apartment overlooking the park saw us run from the construction site, but he was much too far off to describe us. All he recalled was that three boys in their early teens were in an awful hurry.

Also, a woman walking her dog near the hole remembered hearing a boy yell—that would have been Mario, cursing us—shortly before the man in the apartment saw us flee.

But Mario's father dashed any suspicions of foul play. He'd found the body, and at the inquest he said he'd warned Mario many times about playing there. He also testified that from his command post at the hot-dog truck he kept Mario in view nearly all the time, and as for the three other boys, he'd observed them leaving before Mario even reached the hole.

We were off the hook with the law, but Joe's testimony didn't help us sleep easier.

"Why'd he lie?" Buddy wondered. "Mario never played at the hole or anywhere else, he was always workin'. And if he saw us running away, he knew darn well we were there when Mario was. . ."

Outside, rain splattered against the drug store's window. It was a night several months after Mario's death. Buddy's uncle, the pharmacist, was in back mixing a prescription, and Buddy, Al and I were alone at the soda fountain.

Things had changed. I gave the orders now, and it was amazing, how much influence I wielded in the sophomore class with Buddy as my lieutenant.

"Maybe," Al said hopefully, "he just didn't want no more trouble."

"That could be," Buddy said. "He sure got in trouble enough. All those stolen goods the police found, in that house-trailer where he and Mario lived. And the Italian, telling the police Joe threatened to slit his throat if he didn't move his stand a mile away, so Joe could have the beach to himself. . ."

Bizarre, the newspapers had called the story, especially after the police learned Joe and Mario had been nomads, wandering from city to city, and that Mario had never spent a single day in school.

Still, as a concession to the bereaved father's grief, the charges against him were reduced to misdemeanors, and he'd been sentenced to a short jail term.

"I'm not so sure," I mused. "People like Joe don't trust the law. When something like this happens, they take the law into their own hands. Family honor. It might be he intends to get revenge in his own way."

"That's crazy." Buddy seemed as anxious to con-

vince himself as to convince me. "Anyhow, he didn't get much of a look at us. He doesn't know our names, or where we live, or anything else. . ."

Al, who'd been reaching for a phosphate, glanced over my shoulder and froze.

Slowly, I looked around.

Joe Smith walked in. He wore a raincoat and a broad-brimmed hat, and his hands were in his pockets.

He strolled to within a few feet of us and stopped, his eyes two burning orbs in the hatbrim's shadow.

"Hello, boys."

We just stared.

He studied us a moment.

Then, speaking very deliberately, he added: "I tell you something. For what you did to Mario, I'm going to kill all three of you. Maybe soon, maybe not for many, many years. The police can't save you. From now on, wherever you go, whatever you do, I'll know. And when I think the time's right, I'll strike you down."

Erectly, Joe walked back into the night.

It took a while to forget that threat.

For years, I locked bedroom windows, avoided high places and never ventured into a dark street alone. Although I finagled a desk job in the Army, I spent hours at rifle and pistol ranges, and at college I undertook the study of boxing, wrestling, judo and karate.

After fifteen years, though, I hardly gave it a thought. I'd concluded Joe's words had been those of a man warped by sorrow, the extension of a threat he'd never carry out.

I hardly gave it a thought, that is, until I drove to my office one morning, opened my *Sun-Times* and read about Al's strange death.

I hadn't seen Al since high school graduation day. According to the paper, he'd been a bachelor, a door-to-door awning salesman for a firm frequently in trouble with the Better Business Bureau.

Al's body was discovered in his car, parked behind the fieldhouse that now occupied the hole where Mario had died. He'd been shot in the head. And in his right hand, the police found a bag of peanuts.

Slowly, I put the paper down.

"Anything wrong?" Mr. Harbeen asked.

Harbeen was my boss. A short, dapper, middle-aged man with a coiffured thatch

of silver hair, he'd just dropped some documents on my desk. Except for his secretary, Wilma, we were a two-man outfit, occupying small quarters in a large building on LaSalle Street.

I'd thought, when I quit a job with a big brokerage firm to join Harbeen Investments, that I'd prosper. Harbeen had sought me out to offer what he called the chance of a lifetime, but I'd been with him two years now and the big pay increases he'd hinted at hadn't been forthcoming. I had to produce more, he explained genially, before I could earn more.

Producing more, though, was impossible. Harbeen kept the best customers—widows with huge inheritances to invest—to himself, leaving me to manage the portfolios of elevator operators, shopgirls and pensioners.

"I—I'm okay," I said. "I guess. Just a touch of flu."

"You don't look at all well. And you've lost weight lately, you're not eating enough." Much too eagerly, his eyes narrowed. "You're not on the sauce, are you? You can confide in me. If that's it, I'll give you the name of a place where you can dry out. And help your wife with the expenses while you're gone. . ."

"No sir, it's not that. I. . ."

The phone rang.

It was Buddy.

"Don, you see the story?"

"Yes," I replied guardedly. "And let's discuss it over lunch. The market's shaky, and I'd advise a defensive program."

Buddy was lapping up a triple bourbon when I joined him in the booth. Already fat and flabby, he owned a liquor distributorship now. Reportedly the underworld Syndicate had a secret interest in the firm, but nobody could prove it and the rumors didn't seem to worry Buddy.

He was worried about Al's murder, though.

"It's him," he said tautly. "Joe Smith, lyin' low all this time. He got Al, and we're next. A nothing like Al—who cares? But you and me—hell, for us, life's just beginning. That's why he waited so long. Just when we both think we're in clover, he'll rub us out."

As far as Buddy was concerned, I was coining a mint with Harbeen. Buddy had done well, and eventually I hoped to get my hands on his portfolio. When you're in the business of handling other people's money, it doesn't pay to let potential customers know you're on the verge of personal bankruptcy.

"We're in a spot," I agreed. "If we told the police about Mario at this late date. . ."

"They'd sure charge us with something. And even if it didn't stick, we'd be ruined. My financial backers—they don't like that kind of publicity. The only reason they're financing me is, I never had no trouble with the law. And you. . ."

Buddy didn't have to spell it out. Any kind of a homicide charge would demolish me in the investment business.

"We're locked in, then. Nowhere to turn." I paused. "Unless, in your dealings with those backers of yours. . . ."

"Yeah. And I'm glad you mentioned it first." Buddy leaned forward, his tone becoming conspiratorial. "Look, it'll cost dough, fifty-fifty, but that won't be no problem. Will it?"

"Of course not," I lied.

"Okay, I know a guy. All he needs is a name and address. Or even a description, and where to find Joe at the moment. He'll take it from there, he can raise an army with a phone call. It'll be a professional job, what they call a contract, and those boys don't miss."

"Uh-huh. But we don't know Joe's current name and address. If he shaved off his moustache, we don't even know what he looks like. He could have dyed his hair, gone bald or gained a hundred pounds. Even his voice —we only heard him speak a few times. It's been fifteen years, and if he trained himself to lose his accent, we could listen to him all day and not recognize it. . ."

"It's our only chance," Buddy argued. "We gotta kill him, before he kills us. Dog eats dog." He settled back, his mind made up, and reluctantly, I concluded he was right. "We'll get on it today," Buddy continued. "Take the afternoon off. We'll go to the library, to see what the old newspapers had about Joe's background. Then we'll call another guy I know. He'll check the police records, to learn if Joe got arrested later on. And after that. . ."

On the way home that night, I stopped at a suburban gun shop and bought an M-1 carbine, a .45 automatic pistol, a tiny .22 revolver and plenty of ammunition.

Mother Steed eyed me with suspicion as I lugged the packages through the living room. A huge, ugly woman, she occupied my favorite easy chair, munching candy and

watching an old movie on television.

I'd married her daughter, Elaine, under the impression they were rich. Recent arrivals from Detroit, they'd enrolled in a free investing course I taught in hopes of finding new customers. During class, Mother Steed's questions strongly suggested that her late husband, Gus, was an auto magnate who'd left her a vast fortune in cash and securities.

I learned otherwise after the elopement. Gus had been a used car dealer, not an auto magnate, and his estate consisted of a few thousand in savings and some stock certificates good only for papering walls.

What's more, mother and daughter proved chronic spendthrifts, unable to walk through a department store without charging everything that struck their fancy. They put me further in hock for two new cars and a big house in the suburbs, something we needed like a hole in the head, and then Mother Steed moved in with us. My polite protests had been in vain, since Elaine and Mother Steed were very close.

"What's in those boxes," Mother Steed wanted to know.

"Guns," I said. "I'm taking up hunting."

She snorted. "Idiot. A bungler like you, you'll shoot yourself by accident."

That was Mother Steed, always radiating sweetness and light.

Elaine was in the kitchen, deciding which teevee dinner to heat for supper. She was a miserable cook. But despite her faults and her mother, I liked Elaine. What man wouldn't? She was tall, attractive, and marvelously curved, and what's more, we understood one another. She'd married me under the impression I had money too, and when the truth came out she decided, as I had, to make the best of it.

"Forget supper a minute," I said. "There's something important I have to tell you."

We went out to the back yard, the only place on the property where Mother Steed couldn't eavesdrop without our spotting her first.

"What's wrong?" Elaine leaned against a tree, her arms folded across her chest. "You didn't quit, did you? I know it's unfair, the way Harbeen treats you, but we can't afford. . ."

"It's not Harbeen. You remember the night before we were married, when I had too much to drink and told you

about the little gypsy boy? And warned you there was always a chance someone might dredge up the affair again?"

"Yes, but it wasn't your fault. The other boys killed him. And after all these years, the police can't. . ."

"Mario's father," I announced, "murdered Al last night. And he'll come for Buddy and me next."

Quickly, I filled her in on the details.

"Buddy's right," she concluded thoughtfully. Taking the story to the police would ruin both of you, and Joe Smith might kill you anyhow. You've got to handle it yourself. What'd you learn about the man?"

"Not much. His fingerprints weren't on file in any other city, so the police never did learn his real name. And after he got out of jail here, he sold his trailer truck and hot-dog stand and disappeared."

"What'll you do now?"

"We got prints of the police photos taken when Joe was arrested. A retoucher's going to paint the moustache off one, so we'll know how Joe would have looked clean-shaven. Then Buddy'll have hundreds of copies made, with and without the moustache, and we'll give 'em to his underworld friend. They'll be circulated to gangsters all over the country, with word there's a price on Joe's head. A thief like Joe must have had criminal contacts, fences and whatnot, who'd recognize him."

"This'll be expensive, won't it?"

"Yes. But I'll raise my share somehow. We're meeting Buddy's friend tomorrow night, to negotiate the price." I shook my head. "Elaine, I'm not perfect, but I never thought I'd go this far. Pay for a man's murder, to save my own neck. I don't have the slightest personal animosity toward old Joe. It's too bad I can't find him myself, to try to persuade him I never laid a hand on Mario. That I even did what little I could to help him. . ."

Elaine said, "I know it's a terrible thing, Don. But it's him or you, so we don't have much choice, do we."

Good old Elaine. I don't know why I'd ever worried about her reaction. She always did see the practical side of things, and that night we drove to a pistol range and I showed her how to operate the .22.

"It's togetherness," she remarked on the way home. "You and me, our little famly against the world. Now, if

you'd only let me tell mother. . ."

"Don't you dare. But don't stray from her, either. A better bodyguard, money couldn't buy. . ."

In the morning I stopped at Harbeen's desk before going on to my own. The .45 was in my briefcase. A dull clank sounded when I put it down, and Harbeen gave me an odd look.

"Feeling better?"

"Some."

"That's good. Mrs. Bradshaw's coming in today. You know, the railroad magnate's widow, and I want you to work up an analysis of. . ."

"Sure, anything. But first, I'd like to arrange an advance on my salary. It's Mother Steed. She requires immediate surgery, and. . ."

"Sorry." Harbeen drummed his fingers, which meant he was annoyed. "If you lived within your income, instead of indulging every whim of those women of yours, you'd have plenty of cash."

A bachelor, Harbeen had no sympathy for my family problems.

"As a matter of fact," he went on, "I meant to talk to you about that. Some of your creditors called me, and in the future I'll insist that you exercise more responsibility. Take command of that household, boy. Put those women on a budget. If you don't, you won't be working for me much longer."

A fine thing, I'd not only not get the loan, but I was in danger of losing my job.

Oh, well. I'd think of something.

Buddy phoned that afternoon. He planned to hole up in his apartment all day, and from the slur in his voice he had a bottle for company.

"The pictures came," he said, "and you'd be surprised how different Joe Smith looks without a moustache. You could stare at him for hours, you'd never know him. He's a dumb-looking guy, actually."

"Everything set for tonight?"

"Yeah. Be at my place about six. We'll decide how much we're willing to pay and then go see my friend and negotiate." He chuckled. "In a way, I almost hope Joe tries to brace me here. I got a two-way mirror in the door. If he knocks, I'll make a quiet phone call to my friend. They'll hit Joe when he leaves the building. And if he forces his way in, I'll blow him in two with a 12-gauge shotgun. I'd be protecting my castle, it's legal, and to make sure I'll plant a knife in his hand."

Cheery thought. Murder had become a callous fact of life to both of us. What a crazy world.

Mrs. Bradshaw, the rail magnate's widow, wandered in a little after three. Harbeen was on the phone, getting closing quotes from the broker, so she waited in my office.

I complimented her on her figure and she said, "You're a dear boy. And I've been thinking. That color television stock you advised me to load up on—the one Mr. Harbeen talked me out of buying—it's tripled in price since then, hasn't it. You think it's still worth taking a flyer in?"

"Not any more." I winked. "But if it's action you want, I might suggest. . ."

Harbeen poked his head in. "Hello, Mrs. Bradshaw. Good news—your AT&T went up a quarter-point today." He looked at me. "And Don, why don't you run down to the stationery store? Wilma needs a new typewriter ribbon."

Swell. He'd just implied, to Mrs. Bradshaw, that my status in the organization was that of office boy.

Harbeen and Mrs. Bradshaw were gone when I returned. As usual, they conducted their serious business discussions in the cocktail lounge of a hotel Mrs. Bradshaw owned.

"That was a dirty trick," Wilma said. "And confidentially, he's going to give you the sack next month. He's already placed an ad in the *Wall Street Journal*, for another young man."

Wilma was plump and fortyish, but I'd always treated her as though she had the charm and appeal of a starlet. Now, finally, my attentions were reaping dividends.

"Why? Because I'm in debt?"

"That's the excuse he's decided to use, but the real reason is, he's afraid of you. Mrs. Bradshaw and some of his other good customers like you a lot. They want you to handle their portfolios, and lately he's spent most of his time talking them out of it, blackening your reputation."

"Thanks for telling me."

Wilma pulled a cigarette from her purse, and I lit it for her. "He's done this before, you know," she went on. "It's his game. He hires a young man with false promises, gives him the dirty work at low pay for a few years, and then fires him. The others didn't have much on the ball, but you—why, Don, if you had the capital, you could start your own business and

steal some of his best clients."

"It's not likely to happen soon. But if I managed that, would you come to work for me?"

"I sure would." Wilma paused. "And I'd tell you things about a few of his customers—Mrs. Bradshaw, for instance—that would surprise you. Secret things Harbeen paid private detectives to dig up. He'll use that information as a last resort, to blackmail those women into staying if they ever decide to take their business elsewhere."

The world had suddenly become crazier still.

A massive reappraisal of my thinking was required—provided I lived long enough to think about anything.

I called home.

"Everything all right?" I asked Elaine. "No incidents? No strangers at the door?"

"Not a thing. But at Field's, we bought the nicest. . . ."

"Take it back. I'm practically fired and we'll have to sell everything, to raise the cash for Buddy's friend."

"Don, don't fret so. And don't do anything rash without consulting me first. Incidentally, you'll have to fix your own dinner tonight. There's a sale at the shopping center."

Well, the girls might as well have their fun while they could.

It was nearly six when I parked down the street from Buddy's apartment building, a glass tower on the Near North Side.

I got out of my car and started walking. Ahead, a crowd had gathered at the mouth of the alley behind the structure.

Clutching my briefcase, I elbowed through the mob, already beginning to suspect what I'd find.

Sure enough, the center of attention was Buddy.

He lay sprawled on his back. And as I watched, a man in a white coat pulled a blanket over his head.

Beyond a rope restraining the crowd, a photographer was packing his gear.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Accident, probably. The guy reeked of booze. Fell seventeen floors, from his apartment. But there were a couple odd angles. He had a hot dog in his shirt pocket. Mustard, onions, celery salt, the works. It's a crazy place to carry a hot dog. . ."

"And the other thing?"

"Pictures. Hundreds of 'em. He musta been holding 'em when he fell, they float-

ed down all over. Mug shots of the same guy, with and without a moustache. Here."

He picked one up and handed it to me.

It was Joe Smith, the moustache painted out.

As the late Buddy had said, a dumb-looking guy, actually, and what's more, I had the vague but growing impression that I'd seen him before.

Elaine and Mother Steed were still out when I got home. I went to my room, opened my briefcase and jammed the .45 into my belt.

Then I went to Mother Steed's room. It took a while, but finally, under an old girdle, I found a faded photograph of the late Gus Steed.

Gus Steed, without a doubt, was Joe Smith without the moustache.

A breath of air caressed the back of my neck.

Slowly, I turned.

Elaine loomed in the doorway, cool and collected as always, her hands at her sides.

"So now," she drawled, "you know."

Just a little too late, my right hand moved toward the .45. She appeared unarmed, but the .22 I'd given her had been small enough to conceal in a palm.

"Yeah. You're Mario's sister. Joe was your father. And because he died before you could carry out your vendetta, you're doing it for him."

"Something like that." Her tone was disarmingly casual, as though she were discussing the weather. "Mother's an American-born gypsy. Father stole her from her tribe, and the summer Mario died, she was in jail in Philadelphia, for shoplifting. Father'd paid some people to care for me, I was still too young to help Mario steal from bathers. . . ."

Elaine took a step forward, her gaze never leaving mine.

"When we were reunited," she went on, "father shaved his moustache, assumed the name Steed and went into the car business in Detroit. But he never let us forget Mario, the last male of his line, and how we had to avenge his death. He wanted us to wait until you three were young men, just beginning to taste the fruits of life, before we struck."

"Buddy and Al—your mother helped you kill them?"

"She killed them herself. She's the widow, it was her right. I was just her lookout."

"I see. And now I'm next."

"Oh, no." Her lips curved

in a cryptic smile. "You don't remember, but the night you told me about Mario, I led you to it. Before we killed anyone, we wanted to know exactly what had happened to my brother, and we concluded it wasn't your fault. We forgave you. I wouldn't have married you otherwise."

"And now I'm supposed to forgive you? Just like that?"

"And why not?" She came closer still. "We know we'd have to tell you the truth eventually. And now that you've found out—Buddy and Al were no loss to the world, and we were compassionate. We killed them before there were innocent wives and children to mourn. And you—you're more like us than you think. It's what drew me to you. You're clever and ruthless, undaunted by adversity, adaptable to any situation. You prefer living by your wits, but if necessary you wouldn't shrink from violence. You were even ready to sanction murder, to protect your own family name. . . ."

She stopped in front of me, her eyes curiously bright and moist.

"Don't you understand? You're king of the tribe now, I accept you as such. Your word is law. We'll have many children, you'll establish a dynasty. In your old age you'll rule dozens of us. We'll beg, borrow, steal or even kill at your command. Think how you could use us, advancing yourself in the cut-throat world of stocks and bonds. . ."

Downstairs, the television set's volume rose to full blast.

"That's all very nice," I said slowly. "But your mother. . ."

"She admires you too. It's just that you don't know how to treat her. She's old-fashioned, she won't respect you as king unless you rule her with an iron hand." Elaine paused. "And incidentally, she ordered me not to mention it, but she's a wonderful cook."

Well, as Elaine had said, if nothing else, I'm adaptable.

"Change your clothes," I snapped, "and mow the lawn. You'll have plenty of time to finish before dark."

I spun her around, shoving her into the hall.

Startled, she glanced back once and hurried to her room.

Thoughtfully, I went downstairs, walked up behind Mother Steed and dumped her out of the chair.

"I'm hungry," I said. "Prepare food. And if it doesn't please me, I'll break a broomstick over your fat head."

Her look of indignation changed to one of growing affection.

A minute later, she was banging pots and pans.

"It'll be beef stroganoff," she yelled happily. "On wild rice. You want a pitcher of martini first, don't you?"

Outside, the power mower started up.

Interesting.

What's more, Mr. Harbeen, who had no dependents, would be no loss to the world either. Mother Steed could drown him in his swimming pool, after which I'd talk Mrs. Bradshaw into bankrolling me in the investment business. I was sure she'd agree, but if she didn't, there were always the things Wilma would tell me about her, as a last resort.

Yessir, there was a lot to be said for reestablishing the tribe in the United States. Especially with me as king. . . .

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pearls

by Philip Wylie

Cedric Bradley, at fifty-three, was short and bow-legged, apple-cheeked, with bland blue eyes and a Cockney accent occasionally audible in his staccato speech. He controlled Bradley, Ltd., the largest and most magnificent jewelry house in London. He had two boasts: his own hand and brain had built the business; and in all the romantic progress of the affair he had never been swindled or robbed.

On a certain morning in May, when Piccadilly poets were thinking of the lilacs at Kew and Bradley was estimating the profits in carved lapis lazuli, the card of Lord Throckmorton of Taine was presented to the jeweler. Throckmorton was ushered in—a tall, tan, rectilinear man with a monocle engraved in his right eye. He was a total stranger to the firm.

Mr. Bradley and Lord Throckmorton moved leisure-

Philip Wylie is of course best known for his A GENERATION OF VIPERS, THE AMBASSADORS, TOMORROW, and other distinguished novels. As Ellery Queen pointed out recently, he also invented both hero-detectives and non-hero-detectives. And he has written about men like Cedric Bradley...

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ly through the commonplaces to business.

"Bradley—I say—my daughter is about to be married."

"Your daughter. Of course."

"Beautiful thing, Gwen is. Shameful life I've led her. We've been twenty years in Australia. Just brought her to London a fortnight ago. First time in her life. And now I've got to pop off to Africa for three months. Must make amends, eh? Giving you carte blanche to help me out, Bradley. A necklace, I thought. Pearls, what? Matched and perfect. Nothing unusual—just the best."

Mr. Bradley's bland eyes became more lifeless and opaque. He said, "Quite."

Throckmorton of Taine stared at the ceiling. "I thought—with three months—you could—er—assemble something decent. About—er—say eighty thousand pounds—what?"

Mr. Bradley's fingers lifted and fell. "Quite," he repeated.

His Lordship extracted a checkbook from his coat. "A deposit, what?" He did not seem to perceive the answering nod. "Say—ten thousand?" Another nod. The check was written. The two men shook hands. A liveried doorman presently ushered the angular Australian into his town car.

Three months passed. Lord Throckmorton entered the establishment of Bradley, Ltd., with a vacant air that vanished only momentarily when the head of the firm exhibited the necklace. "Good Lord, Bradley, they're rather fine!"

"The best."

"I say—my wife's an invalid. Wanted her to see them before Gwen. Perhaps you could send them over?"

Bradley gazed at the finest string of matched pearls he had ever made. "I'd be glad to bring them over myself."

Throckmorton smiled. "Splendid. Tea, or something. I'll ask Her Ladyship."

The little jeweler received a note from Lady Throckmorton, and was received by Lord Throckmorton in the drawing-room. Her Ladyship was wheeled in; a winsome vivacious cripple. She wept when she saw the pearls. A nurse took her away presently and Bradley pocketed the pearls. Lord Throckmorton asked to see them again and was rhapsodizing when his daughter called, "Oh, father!"

A minute alarm crossed his face. The pearls were to

be a surprise at the time of the wedding. Hastily His Lordship dropped them into the drawer of a cabinet that had belonged to Louis XV. Both he and his guest rose to meet the Right Honorable Gwendolyn. She was more than an elegant girl; she was gorgeous. Bradley was exalted, an emotion that gave him the look of placid contentment. The butler served tea and later Throckmorton asked his daughter to sing.

Her father sat near the piano. "Play that old thing I like," he suggested. The butler tiptoed to his side and whispered. Throckmorton nodded, lifted his hands in pantomime apology, and slipped out of the room. Gwen sang on.

It was a long rendition and Bradley listened with his eyes half closed. Gwen finished, glanced at her single auditor, and began another song. When she was half finished, she stopped. "Where's father?"

"He was called out."

"How ridiculous! Excuse me—I'll bring him right back." She left the chamber.

Five minutes passed and then ten. A hollow quiet slowly permeated the house. Bradley paced the floor. By and by he pulled the bell cord. No response. A thought struck him. He went to the Louis XV cabinet and pulled the drawer open. The pearls were gone!

It was not a drawer, in fact, but a sort of chute, lined with silk so that the pearls would not rattle as they slid into the adjacent room. Mr. Bradley walked out to the hall and picked up his hat and stick. Twilight was descending upon London as he opened the carved door that bore the bogus arms of Throckmorton of Taine.

He hailed a cab. At his own apartment the butler swung the door wide and Bradley went somewhat petulantly to his bedroom. He pushed a picture aside, opened the safe behind it, took the bona fide string of matched pearls from his coat pocket, and locked them behind the steel door. When the picture had been replaced he mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief. Then he allowed himself the relaxation of a good, round oath in which Cockney predominated.

perfect alibi

by Coretta Slavska

I felt a little responsible for Eddie Boxer's wild idea and his attempt at a shakedown because I had put the note under his door that night:

"I'm in my daughter's apt. baby-sitting. Come up for a game of cards and a couple of quick ones.

If I hadn't invited him, things might have turned out differently, but any cop knows that ifs and buts are things you just don't think about afterwards.

My daughter, Agnes, and her husband, Dick, left for the local movie house near their home on West 13th Street in New York City, as soon as I put my foot in the door! They hastily called out the usual boring instructions about minding Junior, sound asleep in his crib. So much haste to see those Chaplin shorts, I thought. Well, folks are entitled to all the laughs they can get these days!

After going in to look at

What is an alibi? When is it a "perfect alibi"—a story you can believe in—and when is it a much too "perfect alibi", a story which could be true, which may possibly be true, and yet. . . . . Coretta Slavska, poet, writer, and member of the Mystery Writers of America, lives on Long Island.

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the kid three times and removing his thumb from his mouth three times, I gave up in disgust and let him sleep in peace. He'll never be a cop like me, I decided. No cop ever was a thumb-sucker. I was sure of that!

I wasn't an active cop now . . .just an ex-policeman, retired, and liking my well-earned leisure.

I settled down to enjoy the growing dimness of the room, a smoke in the big chair near the window, and a glimpse of the neighbours passing on their way home.

Someone banged violently on the door. The knob rattled crazily.

"Hey. . .take it easy!" I called out, hoping it wouldn't wake Junior.

I got my big body out of the comfortable chair, and opened the door.

Eddie Boxer stumbled into the room.

One look at his pale face and twitching mouth said he probably had just had a bad shock. I helped him to a chair. For a long moment Eddie couldn't talk. He tried, but nothing came out. Not even saliva. His mouth was sure dry! I knew what that meant. Fear!

I switched on the lamp near Eddie's chair. He shrank from the light like a rudely awakened child. He looked like a child as he lay back in the chair, one hand shielding his eyes from the lamp's glow.

There was a whiskey bottle in the kitchen cabinet. I got to it, and poured a jigger into a glass. Turning, I found Eddie at my elbow.

"Take it easy," I said, and finally got him to the living room, and back in the chair again. I practically poured the whiskey down his throat.

"My wife's dead. . . Millie's dead," he mumbled. And that effort seemed to exhaust him again.

I felt myself staring at him. "Millie is—dead?"

Eddie nodded. His brown wavy hair, matted with perspiration, lay against his forehead. He pushed it away with a hand that trembled. His dark eyes were round with fright. And something else. Desperation!

Words tumbled out of his mouth. "Downstairs in our apartment. Just found her lying there. Blood all over the rug. You've got to help me, Charlie. Remember. . .you wrote me a note asking me to come up here! Help me! She looks like she's been murdered!"

I decided he certainly needed help!

"Just a moment." I

thought quickly. He probably hadn't notified the police. I went to the phone, wondering why he referred to my note.

Eddie stumbled after me. I put him back in the chair.

"Now stay there. And relax. Quit following me around! I'll take care of everything. But first, the police have to be told."

"No. . .not yet." Again the desperate look in his eyes. "Wait. . .I have to talk to you."

I pushed Eddie aside. Plenty of time later to talk. It took a moment to get the station.

I could see Herman reaching for his pad and the stub of a yellow pencil he always used. I had to be brief.

"Herman, this is Charlie Ryan. Sure, I'm just fine! But there's a dead woman in the apartment house where I live. First floor. Apt. 1-A. I'm in my daughter's apartment with the woman's husband: . .Eddie B-o-x-e-r."

Hearing me spell out his last name seemed to frighten Eddie more than anything else. His eyes were narrow slits now. His knees shook. Suddenly he began to sob. I couldn't take that!

"Cut it, Eddie! Tell me what happened. What you know about it. It will help you to talk. . .relieve the shock."

Eddie quieted down a little. He was a big man, six feet two in his stocking feet. The thing I liked most about him was his explosive, hearty laugh. He had an easy manner that signalled friendship, and I had responded.

But the rapport that had existed between us was suddenly gone, and he seemed curiously like a stranger as he lay huddled in the chair, his hands folding and unfolding in his lap.

I didn't like it. Not at all!

"What happened?" I insisted.

Eddie forced his words. "I came to you first, after finding her. You've got to help me. I didn't kill her! I went to the movies early, saw the Chaplin shorts at the Morosco. Millie wasn't even home when I left the apartment. When I got back, I found your note under the door asking me to come up here for a game of cards. And then I went into the bedroom. . . there was Millie. Blood all over!"

"They'll get the guy who did it," I said. "The cops usually do. What are you so scared about. You've got an alibi. You went to the movies!"

I yanked Eddie's head up

abruptly. He stared at me, his eyes bloodshot.

"Yeah, Charlie, so I went to the movies. It's the truth, so help me! But Millie and I quarrelled all the time... the neighbours used to hear us. You heard it plenty of times. So what good is my alibi?"

He seemed to be talking in circles. It didn't make sense. I tried to give him a little assurance.

"Listen to me, Eddie. What if you and Millie did quarrel! You have an alibi for tonight. Just relax so you can talk to the police when they get here. Don't let them see you looking so scared. Relax!"

"The cops!" Eddie shrank into the chair again. He passed his hand over his forehead. It dripped perspiration.

"No cops, Charlie! Please! That's why I came here first. Before the cops get to me. My alibi isn't any good. Every guy who wants an alibi says he went to the movies! But I did go! I just haven't any proof I went. I need an air-tight alibi. So I thought of your note, asking me up here for cards. You're an ex-cop. They'll believe I was with you all the time. All you have to do is say I was here, playing cards!"

"But you went to the movies," I said slowly. "The cops won't ask too many questions."

"I know better than that," said Eddie. "I couldn't take one of those third degrees."

It was beginning to shape now. "Ever had one before?" The words came out before I could stop them.

Eddie's eyes shifted to the floor. "You got me there," he said reluctantly. "Don't know how you guessed! I did a stretch for assault once, got into a brawl over a girl in some hick town. Years ago. And then I got mixed up with some guys who were selling narcotics, heroin, to school kids. I got out of that one. Didn't get convicted. Still, it's on the records. The cops here will dig up everything about me. I won't stand a chance!"

I didn't answer Eddie right away. I was thinking about selling narcotics to kids! To me that was as bad as murder. And maybe, he wasn't guilty of selling dope. Anyhow, it was water under the bridge. What Eddie needed at the moment was an alibi for his wife's murder! And he had one!

"You went to the movies," I said. Eddie nodded, and reached for the whiskey bottle.

Minutes passed. I didn't

like the silence between us. Something was wrong.

We had been good neighbours, if not close friends. Sometimes at night I went into Eddie's apartment to play cards. He had the usual quota of stale and fresh jokes a travelling salesman collects. And he always said he was glad of an ex-cop living upstairs, especially as he was away on trips so often. I wondered now what other items he carried in his travelling case besides ladies' dresses. Dope?

When he was away, Millie didn't stay home nights. I seldom saw her. I heard her come in after midnight, usually. Sometimes there were low, furtive laughter sounds, and often a masculine voice. Once I heard her sob. She was a frail-looking blonde with fringed bangs, and an inviting smile. She had a kind of fluid walk, and her mouth was too red. I didn't like her.

I never mentioned her late homecomings to Eddie. It wasn't my business. Sometimes I heard them quarrelling. I wondered where she went while Eddie was out of town. But, as I said, it was none of my business.

"Thinking about Millie?" Eddie asked. His voice was razor-sharp with bitterness.

I nodded, glad to hear him say anything. "Yes. . .too bad. Got any idea who did it?"

Eddie was calmer now. He pulled out a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his pocket, and lit one. His hand was pretty steady. He seemed again the friendly travelling salesman I had known. Only the little pulse in his throat kept pounding. I watched it. He was still a frightened man. Why?

"Who might have done it?" I asked again.

Eddie frowned. "Can't figure it. I suppose I'm in for some stiff questioning. Aren't you going to help me, now that you know I have a record?"

"I'm not lying for you, Eddie!" But it hurt to turn him down. "You don't need my help. In a case like this, you'll find it better to tell the truth, no one ever got burned for that."

"That's not true," Eddie said bitterly. "Often you read where an innocent guy gets convicted."

I tried to reassure him. "It doesn't happen as often in real life, as in the movies." But I knew if the cops traced Eddie's past record, it wouldn't go too well with him. However, there was time enough to worry about that

when it turned up.

"You've got an alibi," I insisted.

Eddie sagged in his chair. "Charlie, I'm desperate! The cops won't believe me. My boss will fire me! I've threatened Millie lots of times. I accused her of two-timing me. Neighbours repeat things like that. . .things heard through the thin walls. They exaggerate. Help me. I'll pay you well!"

"Cut it," I said. And I nearly hit him!

Eddie stopped. But not for long. "Okay, pal," he muttered finally. "I remember things about you. I remember how much extra money you made during prohibition days. How would you like your reputation around here spoiled a bit. Everyone thinks you're tops!"

"Thanks for the shakedown," I said, as calmly as I could.

He knew then I wouldn't lie for him. He stood there, his eyes shifting from one corner of the room to another. The silence was a heavy curtain between us now, shutting me out from even his thoughts.

He heard the footsteps outside the door the moment I did. The door opened.

It wasn't the cops. Agnes and Dick stood there. My daughter looked very annoyed. She came in and threw her hat on the chair.

"Pour me something to drink," she said.

Her husband waved a greeting to me and walked into the bedroom to look at his sleeping son.

I mixed a whiskey and soda for Agnes. She drank it slowly and said, "We're home so early because the Morosco Theatre was closed. And we did want to see those Chaplin shorts. A notice in the box office window said there had been a fire in the projection room."

Eddie stood quietly. Somehow I didn't want to meet his eyes. But I had to look at him and he spoke.

"I went to the movies," he said in a monotone, and suddenly he swayed.

I put my hand on his shoulder and steadied him.

"Eddie's wife has been murdered," I told Agnes.

She's a cop's daughter, and she knows when to be silent. She just looked at Eddie, her eyes reflecting the surprise she felt, and I saw them widen in sudden terror.

"We're going down to Eddie's apartment now," I said.

Agnes nodded then.

"I went to the movies," Eddie said again.

I gestured goodbye.

"We'll go now," I said, and I tightened my grasp on Eddie. It had been a long time since I held a man like that. I could hear Agnes crying now and calling for Dick. The door closed behind Eddie and me.

How it happened I still don't know. But, on the landing Eddie tore from my hold. He dashed down the stairs. He heard the front door open and the voices of the incoming cops. He turned to the nearest window. As I reached for him, his body broke through the glass, and I heard the horrible sound as it came into contact with the pavement below and his cry of terror.

Agnes and Dick rushed into the hall.

"What happened," they cried.

"He was hell-bent on a perfect alibi," I said.

They followed me down to the street, where a cacophony of voices greeted us. In the sky the moon hung like a silver balloon, and the street lights cast shadows on what was left of Eddie Boxer.

I saw O'Reilly, the detective attached to headquarters, come out of the building.

"Looks like suicide," he said. "She cut her wrists with a razor. Good-looking blonde!"

Suicide! I couldn't say anything. I pointed to Eddie Boxer. The detective bent over him.

"Seems like a nice guy," he said slowly.

He took another look. "And he had the heartiest laugh I ever heard! A real explosive, gun-powder laugh. Once you hear it, you don't forget it!"

I shivered and it wasn't from the night air.

"Where did you hear Eddie Boxer laugh?" I asked.

O'Reilly ran his finger along Eddie's swollen, bloody mouth. He threw a tarpaulin over his face.

"That's the guy," he said. "At least he had a good laugh at Chaplin! he sat next to me in the movies today. Right after he left, the whole place was emptied, as a fire broke out in the projection room."

Agnes touched my arm. Her face was wet with tears. "He had a perfect alibi," she said.

"That he had," I agreed. "And this time he was innocent."

Agnes looked puzzled. "Were there other times when he was guilty?"

"A few," I said, and knew it to be the truth.

chinatown evening

by Stephen Bond

She'd been dead for hours when the kids found her—dead, very very dead as she lay there staring up into the grey tenement-circled sky, eyes screaming the horror of those last minutes—those last seconds, a ragged bloody slash in her pitifully summer-like dress. She'd been there for hours and she might have been there for days if two kids hadn't chased each other into that corner of the weed-covered lot and stumbled over the limp body with the flies hovering over the clotted blood.

What hurt was that she was too young to die—too young and too pretty. She should have been down on Coney Island or over at the Park, eating spun candy and hot dogs and frozen delights and arguing about the latest records or that new step they were trying out on TV last night—instead she was lying there in this dirty lot, hud-

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Mr. Bond tells us that this is the first of a series he plans about the cases of Mr. James Chen, M.A. The Chinatown it tells of is of course terra incognita to the sightseers who throng its narrow streets in the evenings, certain that there are opium dens to which they would be guided if they only knew the right password, and equally certain that Dr. Fu Manchu still lives... They know nothing, and care less, about the law-abiding people, mostly Chinese, for whom Chinatown is home.

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dled as she'd fallen after the killer had struck, handbag—open—at her side, one high heeled shoe—fragile like she had been—just beyond the body. She must have twisted and fought with everything she had in her in those last minutes—but she hadn't been strong enough or lucky enough... I knew someone would remember afterwards that they'd heard a cry sometime earlier that night, but nobody had done anything about it naturally—people mind their own business in this part of town—and whoever had killed her had lost himself in the shadows and run—no, probably just walked—down the street and around the corner and into the void.

For the time being.

Something told me we would find him. What hurt was I'd have to do now—go down the street and across Chatham Square and up Bayard Street a way and then stop before her father's shop. I'd have to walk in—and the bell would ring—and Ah Goy would come out and bow his happiness to see me and I would have to, in effect, slap him and I would have to beat him down and hurt him—hurt him bad—when I told him his daughter Lee was dead—murdered.....

Of course I didn't beat him—of course I didn't slap him—I'm talking nonsense I suppose—but he *looked* like I'd done that when I was through, staring at me with her eyes, waiting for me to go on....

"Where is she now, Jimmy?"

"The Police are still there, Father of Lee. They—" I broke off—he had motioned impatiently and turned, in the next minute, to the cash register. He pulled at the bills that were there—unseeing eyes staring straight ahead all the time—then he was switching off the lights and standing there in the door, waiting for me to move. Five minutes later and we were back at the lot—crowded now with police and newspapermen and ghouls and the curious.

Ah Goy stood there by the body for a minute and we could see him age right there in front of us—age and grow stern and straight with something of the fighter he must have been reflected in him as he turned to the lieutenant to ask where he could claim the body. I knew what must be raging inside him. Lee—fragile, lovely Lee—had been the widower's pride and joy—and torment as she had discovered dancing and

the movies and the excitement of the social clubs in the neighborhood, the more exciting because he'd forbidden her to go to them.

I couldn't keep up with the old man—he walked as if he'd lost twenty years suddenly, and was as young and allegedly active as I'm supposed to be. And as tough. He had followed me when we crossed the square—I was following now—and following as he walked straight up Mott Street and stopping when he stopped in front of the door with the sign scrawled in black on the door—a prosaic looking bell at the side.

He turned to me—and told me "Come!"—and I followed him up the stairs, my hands in my pockets—one hand clutching my gun.

A door.

Two knocks.

And then one.

And a voice.

"Brother?"

And Ah Goy—"It is your humble brother who keeps the shop of the jasmine flowers and his young friend, the son of the Venerable Chen. We seek advice and guidance."

"Enter."

A narrow room—and a curtain in the middle.

And a guard behind us.

Ah Goy motioned reassuringly to me, and then began to speak—not in our Cantonese but in some dialect I didn't recognize—soft, liquid phrases that were suddenly harsh and insistent as he obviously was telling about the murder.

And then he was silent.

Dead silent.

I could hear the guard breathing behind us—and the rustle of papers and someone moving, perhaps more than one person, behind the curtain, and then an old voice was speaking—now in Cantonese, a very old voice by the sound of it and faintly familiar for a second.....

"My son, our brother tells us you are a resourceful man—doing well in this work that you turned to in defiance of your venerable father's wishes. Perhaps this was destined that this should be so. We have ourselves been aware of this and of what you have been doing and happy that you were bringing credit to the men of our province—but now we ask you to serve your own and to join us in the search for this—this evil soul."

The muffled voice—still so familiar and still unrecognized—was silent.

I bowed.

"It is an honor to serve the Association—an honor and a responsibility—but I would anyway have done my best to find the man who did this. I have known the venerable Ah Goy for many years and watched his daughter grow to maidenhood. She was like my younger sister, oh venerable one, and I swore back there—by her body—that I would search for this evil one—before the venerable Ah Goy asked me to come before you."

The guard's breathing was stilled.

Ah Goy turned towards me as the old voice behind the curtain finally spoke softly.

"It is well, my son. We shall have need of you. But remember that we of the South avenge our own!"

The next hours—the next days—were crowded and anything but dull. I slept three hours the first night and two the next. I had reported ill that first morning and sent a messenger over with a note from Doctor Lee—but nobody had put two-and-two together apparently—there'd been a curt "O.K." and that'd been that—I was free to be ill or drop dead or do what I pleased, within reason of course.

Within reason?

The stumble bum I was slapping around thought there was no reason in me—but I was trying to get sense out of his mumbling about the "Chinky kid and the big guy." The sour old hag who was cashier at the movie had thought she'd seen Lee standing outside the movie that night—looking at the "Coming Attractions"—and talking to something tall and male in a sport shirt that shouted money who was standing there next to her—she'd thought Lee knew him. The old man had been sitting in the doorway next to the movie, that she knew—Lord Peter had staggered over to the two and tried to bum enough for a drink out of the man—she'd seen him search for a coin and give it to the old man—and then a customer had come up to the change booth and when she'd looked again, Lee and the man were gone.

The man had been only something tall and male in a sleek looking sport shirt to her—she'd never seen his face—but the old man had talked to them and the old man had seen his face and—damn it—why didn't he talk!

"Lord Peter! Wake up!"

"Wurra ye shay?"

"Wake up, man!"

"Wurra ye hittin' me fur? Ya bloody chink, WURRA YA 'ITTING ME FUR? I'll 'ave t' lar an ya, ah will—yah—yah—the lar on ya!"

"Wake up man! We've got to find out something—"

"Who ya cullin man—am Lo Peetr ya kna—donsha firgit dat—hic!" The old man swayed—a little less than gracefully — bleary-eyed — stinking to high heaven—face flushed where I'd slapped him.

"What kind of man was Lee Goy with tonight, Lord Peter! What kind of guy"—I was speaking slowly and distinctly now—"What kind of guy was she with earlier tonight?"

"Washa talking abou'? Wa'guy?"

"The man with Lee outside the movie earlier tonight? You came over to them and bummed a cigarette off him and then he gave you some money and you went into the saloon next to the hotel—"

"He—*he?* Thash goo guy?"

"Listen, Lord Peter—listen, damn you! You know Ah Goy's daughter?"

"Yeh—"

"You saw her outside the movie tonight—"

"Yeh—"

"With a guy?"

"Yeh but—"

"What did he look like?"

"Dun kno'!"

"WHAT DID HE LOOK LIKE?"

"Dun kno—I tell you—ah dun know!"

"What's the matter—did you close your eyes when you went up to them?"

"Who them?"

"Lee Goy and the fellow she was with—"

"Oh!"

My patience was wearing thin—I spat out the words—"What *did* he look like?"

"'Im? Nice guy!"

"God damn it!", I grabbed the old man by his dirty shirt — "you BASTARD! WHAT DID HE LOOK LIKE?"

"Tak yer goddam hans offa me ya Chink—ya foget whowhom me!"

"The hell I do! Listen—Lord Peter! WHAT DID THAT SONOFABITCH LOOK LIKE? WAS HE YOUNG? OLD? BLACK HAIR? BLOND HAIR? WHAT DID HE LOOK LIKE? LEE GOY WAS MURDERED—"

The old man stared up at me—bloodshot eyes suddenly startled and quivering—"Lil Lee?"—and slowly, "Leetl Lee? Dead?"

I nodded—

Lord Peter was standing again—not too straight but

with something of the dignity of the very drunk—but something was added—his voice was firmer and clearer. "Th' man wi' her? He was tall—most six feet tall—with a scar on his hand—with. . ." And the suddenly soberer Lord Peter proceeded to describe the man who had thrown him a quarter—describe him with a wealth of detail that made you wonder just what the old man had been before he'd ended up on the Bowery.

I turned away finally—only to have him call after me—"Hey Jimmy— look—I'm sorry I called you a Chink—I didn't know—I liked little Lee. . . ." His eyes filled as he stood there, leaning against the wall of the building — unshaven — dirty —sick bloodshot eyes staring at and through me. . .

Two telephone calls and an hour later I was through for the night—through for the morning, rather. Dawn was a matter of an hour or so away—dawn over the new Chatham Square and the rat traps and the tourist holes and the vinos sleeping in the doorways and the ones who wouldn't get up when you kicked them because they couldn't fight any more. Dawn was a matter of an hour or so away and the early delivery trucks were coming down the Bowery, fast—too fast—as they headed for the Row.

There are some advantages to being a Cantonese. I'd always known it—and I learned it again a couple of hours later, when I was down on the street again—my head splitting apart on me—my body yelling for more rest than the hours I'd had upstairs—cold hate driving me on, despite headache and tiredness, knowing I was hours behind this unknown man who had walked across the lot with little Lee and then—I was suddenly cold and very much awake. . . .

As I said, there are some advantages to being a Cantonese. I knew one of those advantages when I spoke at the Splendid Endeavour Benevolent Association's meeting that night—describing the man Lord Peter said had been with Lee—describing him the way Lord Peter had done—from the scar on his hand to the tic in his eye.

And I thought it again, later that evening, when I repeated the description at the Central Laundrymen's Association—three hundred men listening quietly as I described the shirt the man had worn the way Lord Peter had described it—and then

the man himself—from the scar on his hand to the tic in his eye to the color of his hair—warning them, though, that Lord Peter might be wrong in some point and that we couldn't be certain that this *was* the killer....

There *are* some advantages to being a Cantonese.

I knew it when an old man in the back of the room stood up and said he thought he knew the man—he had seen him once when he had come to his humble establishment, complaining that a shirt had been torn—usually the Filippino boy who did for him picked up the laundry but this time he'd come down himself—angry and blustering the way all these Americans blustered when they were uncertain....

There was a murmur in the room....

But he was right, the old man insisted. These people always blustered—they always behaved as if the laundrymen were coolies—shouting at them—complaining—arguing about this and arguing about that—yes—*this* man was known to him—he wore the kind of shirt that the English drunk had described....

Juan Tarasey proved accommodating. Maybe because he was accomodating anyway. Maybe because Murray had a habit of shouting at him too—blustering—damning him for an ignorant sonofabitch—a Fillipino sonofabitch—not understanding that this sort of thing is not always appreciated by our Fillipino brothers.

I searched the man Murray's apartment, a matter of hours after we'd learned about him. I'd gone back to the narrow room with the curtain in the middle, and reported what we had learned—and then I'd gone up there in the sixties—found out where Murray lived—and gone on from there. Juan Tarasey proved accommodating—easy to convince—Tao held a twenty-dollar bill in one hand and a knife in the other, once we'd gotten in. Juan had promptly chosen the twenty dollars....

I phoned downtown and had them bring up Lord Peter in a car—and then we sat there, outside the apartment house, waiting for Murray to come home—talking quietly among ourselves—Lord Peter, sober and grim, with eyes fixed on the front door.

Finally a man—a tall man—neared the building.

We tensed.

No—he was walking past us.

Another—no—he'd turned off before he reached this house.

But now—finally—it had to be *he!*

Lord Peter looked like he wanted to get out of the car—like he wanted to push his way through us. "That was him," he shouted—"that was him!"

It *was* Murray. . . .

It was Murray—but we had no proof that he had killed the girl.

What now?

He went out a while afterwards, and we went up to the apartment—Lord Peter had gone back to the Bowery but the others were with me—two able young men whom the Association had loaned me.

It *was* Murray—what now?

Juan Tarasey came up with a suggestion—with more than one suggestion, actually. He had wondered when things would get too difficult for Murray, and the very possibility that Murray might have murdered the girl made him doubly cooperative.

Very much so.

Juan went home at ten o'clock.

When Murray returned at two o'clock—he was startled to find the door to the apartment open—but nothing had apparently been disturbed. Nothing—he suddenly realized—except a portrait he'd never had—a portrait of that little Chinese girl.

He swept the picture off the table. Somehow it fell on a side—and there the girl was staring at him with those wide naive eyes of hers.

He went into the bedroom. Another picture facing the bed this time—and now Murray was scared. He'd wondered first if he was seeing things—if he was drunk—but these were no visions—this was real—and frightening.

The telephone rang and something told him he shouldn't answer it—he took the receiver off the hook quietly and started to listen—it was *her* voice—a young Chinese girl's voice anyway! He slammed down the receiver and started to sob with fright.

Out—he must get out.

Anywheres!

He couldn't stay there—not with these pictures and these calls and the knowledge that something had gone very very wrong—as wrong as anything could be!

The next thing we knew

Murray was half-staggering, half-running out of the building. Coatless. Without a hat.

Wandering aimlessly down the avenue—saying something to himself that we couldn't catch as we followed in the car.

Until we got to the Aloha—the clipjoint up on the Boulevard with the darkened lights and fading beauties and watered whiskey. Fading but willing beauties, very willing....

And now a murderer—or at the very least a man at the bar with a very guilty conscience—who didn't know anything until he felt Tao's knife in his back and the whispered warning, "Come quietly. We are armed!"

The four of us were lost in the crowd—some minutes later we were outside and sitting in Shen's car—Tao, next to Murray in the back, ostentatiously playing with his knife, each time whirling it closer to Murray's face.

Closer.

And closer.

And closer.....

There was blood on Murray's shirt when we were through—very little, really, but still his own blood—he was sobbing and swearing that he hadn't meant it—he hadn't meant it....

And suddenly I was very sick of it all. Sick of the blood. Sick of the filth that was this man.

Sick enough to tell him that perhaps we would let him live after all—if he did one thing—walk into the police station across the way and confess to the murder of Lee Goy.

It's possible that we may have persuaded him a little more—a little more impatiently than was entirely proper. But all of us were tired—I had hardly slept for days—and there was something disgusting about this shaken hulk of a man who had been brave enough to kill little Lee but was so afraid, himself, of death.....

Oh yes—we won the argument.

We sat in the car—perhaps an hour later, probably much less—and watched him drag himself up the stairs and into the police station.

And we got the signal—I'd phoned a friend and arranged for it—we got the signal that he'd given himself up for the murder of Lee Goy.

We'd have waited for him outside there, otherwise....

Even though we were all so tired.

We would have waited for him.....

scratch one paradise

by Arthur Moore

It is colder than the keel of an Eskimo's kayak. My long johns are long gone, so I shiver my way to Katzie's Saloon and bask in the hot air which is coming out of Jonesy's mouth.

Jonesy is the bartender, a fat, slouchy slob with a little twitchy moustache, a cat who has hayfever so bad he sneezes at flowered wallpaper. He has also more information and fewer facts at his fingertips than a congressman.

"Dubois," Jonesy says, scratching his belly, "I'm glad you showed." He slaps the bar rag in circles and sets me up a small beer which means I have got to lissen to him at least till I finish the lager.

"Who's with the bottle in the corner?" I ask to delay the filibuster.

"Nicky Cotterfield," he says. "Lissen, Dubbois, Bindle Moran was just tellin' me about this voter who has this glass eye which he would fill with peanut butter. When he

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It is to be hoped that some of you will remember both Dubois and Katzie's Saloon from WRIGGLE ROOM ONLY, which appeared in our Dec. 1965 issue. True to our tradition of bringing to you from time to time stories which can be said to reflect one or another aspect of the Great Society, here is another adventure of Dubois, reluctant adventurer. . . .

is hungry, he eats same usin' his little finger to scoop it out—"

"Nicky must have got him a problem if he is soppin' it outa a bottle."

"Uh huh. One night this schmoo is at his AA meeting over on the south side, and he forgets. He takes out the glass eye and starts eatin' the peanut butter and all the AA guys—"

"Maybe Nicky is in trouble," I say. I get up and hop over to his table while Jonesy slams the bar rag down and says like gees says when they miss a winner at Temple Park.

Nicky Cotterfield is an ex-paperhanger who has promised the parole board he will stop signing other people's names to checks. He has hung up his ink bottle and is working for Digger Doyle who is about as tough as they come. And when he comes, everyone else goes.

When I sit down opposite Nicky, he blears at me and reaches out to brush the fog away. I say, "Hi, Nicky," and he raises his bushy eyebrows.

"Oh, h'lo, Dubois. Did you bring them owls?"

I promise him they are harmless and he smiles. He is a pasty-faced citizen who looks about as con wise as a sugar doughnut and not half as healthy. He does not have enough hair to make carrying a comb worthwhile—except what is growing out of his ears. There is a bottle in front of him which he picks up and shakes. Then he pours out a gulp in a shot glass and stares at it. I watch it too, till I realize it ain't going to say nothing.

"I am not a drinkin' man, Dubois," he remarks, weaving a little to keep me in focus. "I have been drove to this condition by circumstances the which of what I would not rec-recommend to them that has did me less than—" He pauses and frowns. "By certain complex-ities and under-handments—"

"What's your problem?" I ask.

"I can't get outa this sentence," he says.

"You ain't dodgin' somebody?"

"Digger Doyle. Only I ain't really dodgin' him. He don't know yet."

"He don't know what?"

"That's right," Nicky says, and downs the gulp. It twists his baby face all up and then he is even sadder looking than before. He is a short, flabby type who could pass for an overage campfire boy who has been lured and lost by a evil lass with a leaky tambourine.

He is a wonder with pen and ink and his open, innocent puss is his second biggest asset. These blessings cinch a spot for him in stir but, since the fuzz fit him with the ten dollar threads and surround him with a parole officer, he has forsook that route. He is in the bookkeeper trade, but his only books belong to Digger Doyle.

"You ain't been jugglin' the addition!" I gasp, knowing that this would be a horrible error.

"I only wish it was nothin' worse than that." Nicky sighs deeply. "But Digger has been boosted for five grand, and now I ain't gonna get married."

Naturally I think that these is two different things, and the most important is that Digger has been took. I mention this.

"Who told you?" scowls Nicky. "He ain't sposed to know yet."

"You just did. You said Digger has—"

"Oh, I remember now. She was a wonnerful girl, Dubois, wonnerful. And she will cry her heart out." He pours out another gulp and takes both hands to get the bottle down on the table again.

"She?" I ask. "There is a girl in the picture?"

"Wimmin cryin' is more than I can stand, and that is why I am nibblin' at this here giggle water. So I can stand it."

I remember that Nicky has been carrying on with a blonde chorus cookie. "You mean Anabelle?"

"Who else? We was to be married in a couple months, mebbe three. Whenever she made up her mind."

So Anabelle has threw him over. It is not clear to me what that has got to do with Digger, so I ask. "You have maybe lost your job?"

"Oh no. But the house was for her, you know."

"What house?" I am beginning to feel like things are not adding up to anything digable. I watch him güzzle and gulp and feel around in the fog for the bottle.

"The house which I bought on account of me and Anabelle becomin' one." He pours out another belt. "The dream has all gone up in smoke like a hot monkey wrench dropped in the beans."

I sneak a snifter from his bottle and reflect. Anabelle is a bleached blonde hoofer who squirms at one of them uptown squirrel cages. She is soft and cuddly as a roll of barbwire, and is all heart. Only her heart is made up of the same kind of jazz they put on the sides of battle-

ships to keep out torpedoes. I cannot imagine what she sees in Nicky. If she has stopped squeezing his toothpaste tube, he is lucky.

"I wish," moans Nicky, "she had never innerduced me to C. D. Frulit."

I did not expect this either. "What is a seedy frulit?"

"Not seedy. C. D. And I am gonna give you like a slice of cheap advice, Dubois, on account of you are not loaded with smart. Run, do not walk, to dodge C. D. Frulit. He has drove me to the happy sauce and has took Digger."

I am finally getting to the cream of the con. "C. D. Frulit is a blue sky salesman?"

Nicky nods and leers at the gulp in the shot glass. "He could sell moustache wax to the Statue of Liberty. C. D. is peddlin' stock. You know where Monoloki Island is, Dubois?"

"Don't jump around so much," I say. "No, I never heard of that place. No."

"It is an island in the Pacific Ocean. One of them dreamy tropical paradise places, and C. D. Frulit owns it, lock, stock and coconuts."

"What has this island got to do with—"

"He owns them spray drenched shores and the cliff where the bootiful native broads used to nosedive into the drink on account of they was loused up in love. He owns the volcano which goes whooooosh ever' now and then so the red hot lava squishes all over the palm trees—only C. D. closed it up."

"The volcano?"

"Sure. He owns it, don't he? Don't you know nothin', Dubois?" He drains the glass and pours out another gulp and kind of pats it. "Volcanos is bad for tourists."

"I don't get it. How d'you close up a volcano?"

Nicky gives me a long lingering wink which kind of slants him to starboard. "Because he made it up."

"He made it up?"

Nicky thumps his ear and looks around. "There's a echo in here." He frowns in my direction. "C. D. invented the whole island. There ain't no island, and he is sellin' stock in this phony hula paradise. He is—"

"There ain't no island?"

"—gonna sub-sub—cut it up for lots. Hunnerds of lots to sell to dumb tourists. He is gonna glom a million clams on account of the climate is like sleepin' pills and them bootiful island dolls do a floor show ever' day. C. D. has movies of this." Nicky lowers his voice and leans for-

ward. "Them broads tie grass aroun' their fanny and shake it so you keep thinkin' the grass is gonna fall off—only it don't."

"It lissens great," I say. "Where do you come in?"

"I bought ten lots. Made a down payment of two hunnerd clamaroonies. Ever' damn penny I had inna world, not countin' the house."

I cudgel my forehead. "If you didn't put up the house, how come you to lose it?"

Nicky waves a finger and blinks at me around the bottle. "Smart. That C. D. is smart as a split lip. You ever see a brain, Dubois? They is made up of all little wiggly things. You think and they go wiggle, wiggle." He waggles his finger at me. "Only C. D. has got a brain which wiggles so fast it makes his hair itch."

Nicky downs the gulp and scrunches up his face.

"You mean you didn't own the house?"

"Who says? Don't you b'lieve it. " 'Course I own it. Worth five, six thousan' fish. When me and Anabelle—"

"OK. So you own it. Go on about C. D."

"Then don't gab so much. Ain't that what I'm tellin' you? Two hunnerd Irish flags, that's all I give him."

I do not follow this, so I shrug off the house. "Then Anabelle didn't dig this con, huh? That why you ain't getting married?"

"Oh, no. Anabelle is itchy for it. She says this is the chanct to make a killin'. She wants me to put up the house."

"You're mixin' me all up, Nicky," I complain.

"That's prolly 'cause you're doin' all the gabbin'," he says. "I'm tryin' to—and you're sittin' there gab, gab, gab. You know what you remind me of? C. D. Big Mouth, that's what! Big talker—big!"

I tell him I am sorry and he bows at me and almost knocks over the bottle. "Where was I? Did I get to Digger yet?"

"No."

"All right. Digger, he ain't a talker. You know that, huh, Dubois?"

I nod my head very fast. Everyone knows Digger Doyle is not much in the mouth department. He remarks only things that is absolutely necessary, like, 'Snake eyes, you lose'. But I would not put him in a cage with a Bengal tiger unless it was a tiger I was going to throw away anyhow.

Nicky says, "Digger finds out about this solid proposi-

tion and he don't like to be left out on nothing that makes mazuma. That ain't no secret."

"But he is a sport which likes a sure thing."

"Ain't it a fact! Digger says to me, 'Pal, we is partners.' It turns out I am to put up the house and he will put up five grand for stock—so if the island sinks, he will get the house. But C. D. don't know this."

"That's Digger," I say, "makin' you copper his bet."

He blinks at me. "But I am gettin' a share of the proceeds. I am also wearin' rose colored glasses which C. D. has hung on my nose. I figger nothin' can go south with this here plan. Besides, Anabelle is likewise rollin' her baby brown blinkers at me and makin' them certain moony sounds."

"I dig. With your percentage, you are in the clover. Except that there ain't no island."

"Who knows it then?" says Nicky. "C. D., he has colored maps showin' it clear as a clout on the kisser. So Digger furnishes the five thou and both of us sign this secret contract like, for the house, I have got a share in Digger's cut."

Nicky pauses and tosses the gulp down his gullet and gets both hands around the bottle. I help him dribble out another snootful. "And then," he says in a hollow voice, "I find out that Anabelle is playin' footsie with C. D. Frulit."

"Oh, oh! Anabelle is givin' you the old come on?"

"Gab, gab, gab," says Nicky. "Ain't that what I jus' said? Anabelle and C. D. is in cahoots. They are lovey-dovey on this nest and Digger's dough is the egg. But when they hatch it, I will be the sport which is out the moo."

"I am sorry you have lost the house," I say, "but as for Anabelle—"

"It ain't lost, the house."

"But you just said—"

"I have lost Anabelle. I have lost the house only if C. D. Frulit does not dig up Digger's dough."

I am getting fed up with Nicky. He is too hard to understand. "But there ain't no island—it's all a frame."

"Dubois," says Nicky, "there ain't no Monoloki Island at all. That's what I said, right? Didn't I said that's what there wasn't none?"

"Well—"

"The trouble with you is gab, gab—like C. D. Frulit. There ain't no Monoloki Island on account of C. D. made it up to skin me out

of the house. But—" Nicky waves a finger in my general direction. "There is somethin' which C. D. did not know."

"Quick—what?"

"There is another island where he says Monoloki is. Opani Island is in the same place."

"Holy catfish!"

"It ain't possible for two—? Naw, it ain't."

"That's right," I say. I am sure that two islands cannot occupy the same space at once. But, by now, it is the only thing I am sure of.

"I went and got this big map," he goes on, "from the public liberry. And there it is, plain as a catcher's mitt in a Caesar salad. No Monoloki!"

"And you show this to Digger?"

"Not me!" he says with a evil wink. "Me, I know what Digger would do." He sips the moonshine and looks at it against the light. "If Digger finds out C. D. Frulit has slipped him a fast shuffle and a phony island to boot, what would Digger do, Dubois?"

"Well," I say, rubbing my chin. "If he ain't out the five G's on account of your house, maybe nothin'."

Nicky nods. "Digger would laugh his crummy head off at me. He might even buy C. D. a drink on the house. Digger is impressed with gees which is handy in the headbone department."

"But I don't—"

"Then stop gabbin' and I will tell you. When I find out about this fake island, I mention to Anabelle that it is Digger's dough in the pot."

"That shakes her, huh?"

"She looks like she has been hit with a meteorite." He leans forward and leers at me around the bottle. "But Anabelle and C. D. do not know Digger like I do. This is my hole card."

I nod many times. Digger has a terrible reputation. If he had been with General Grant, he would have scared them British off Bunker Hill all by himself.

Nicky smiles. "So, right after Anabelle and C. D. Frulit gets the five thou, I leave the public liberry map where Anabelle will have to move it to pack."

"Then she will think you are gonna rat to Digger with the real McCoy."

He nods owlishly. "Anabelle will see that Opani Island is where Monoloki is sposed to be. She is not vacant behind the eyeballs. She will hustle this map to C. D. Big Mouth."

"Uh huh," I say. "Then they will both blow town."

Nicky disagrees. "She is not empty between the ears, and neither is C. D. If they pull a fade with Digger's fist full, won't Digger put out the word?" He giggles and nibbles at the booze. "They will think so—and that's as good as it bein' so, ain't it?"

"You are playin' them against Digger!"

"Ain't that what they done to me? When C. D. sees that liberry map, he will figger Digger is breathin' down his neckband. And that is why I'm settin' here." He smiles at the gulp in the glass.

"I don't get it."

"C. D., he don't want it either. He ain't hankerin' for a hit."

"But why are you sittin' here?"

"Because there's a phone," Nicky says. He points to the blower on the wall. "Sooner or later C. D. Frulit will work down the list to this here number. He will call and offer to give back the moo before Digger finds him."

I open my mouth wide in astonishment. I am beginning to receive the pitch.

"If you was han-some," says Nicky, "which you are not, would you want your profile altered?"

I am about to reply in the derogative when the phone rings. I jump several fathoms but Nicky gets to his feet and waves Jonesy away. He wades to the phone like he is navigating a swamp.

I can see him smile when he talks into the mouthpiece. Then he hangs up and bucks the waves back to the table.

"C. D. Frulit," he says, smiling like a chorus girl on a tour through the mint. "He will be here with the total take in ten minutes." He gobbles the gulp and this time offers me one which I accept. "I am afraid he has lost Anabelle too."

"Big loss!" I say.

He sighs and pours out one more gulp and looks at it like it reminds him of mother. "I will have to sell the house now. With no Anabelle, I got no use for same."

"Well anyway," I say, eying the bottle. "It sure is lucky you found this here Opani Island. How come you to locate it, in the nick of time, like?"

"Oh that," says Nicky. "The same way C. D. found his island." He makes with the fingers like he is drawing it. "I just made it up."

Continued from other side)

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